



Downey Council PTA
Thirty-Third District
California State PTA
PTA (National)

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Janet Gera, Editor

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

The 200-07 school year is off to a great start. All nineteen of our PTA units have been busy with membership drives, fundraising, attending trainings and workshops, Red Ribbon Week, and much, much more. "Thank you" to Rita and Mel Berdelis, Dawnie Frize, and all of the agents of Prudential 24 Hour Real Estate who supported our Red Ribbon Week activities. The school sites looked great and we appreciate the efforts of all the parents and staff members who went above and beyond to impact Downey's students through drug abuse awareness education.



Parents, a great way to supplement arts education is to encourage your children to participate in the PTA Reflections Program. Entries are due this month and forms with guidelines and rules are available at the school sites. Categories are literature, visual arts, photography, musical composition, dance choreography, and film/video production. This year's theme is "My Favorite Place".

As Downey Council PTA president, I would like to encourage all parents to take an active part in your child's education and get involved in your school's PTA. We support the schools not only financially but also with our time, talents, skills, and energy. Please get involved. There are many things you can do to help, some only requiring your time once or twice a year. Don't just tell your children that education is important – show them by volunteering at their schools! You can contact your PTA officers through your child's school office if you are interested or need more information.

I hope to meet many of you during the next several months. Remember: children ARE the future – there is no better investment.

Angel Kellogg

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE
NOVEMBER 7TH!

The California State PTA has taken positions on three of the thirteen ballot measures that have qualified for the November 7, 2006 General Election ballot. They are looking to pass Proposition 1D and Proposition 86 and to defeat Proposition 88. In short, State PTA's rational are as follows:

Proposition 1D will continue to provide funds for the reduction of overcrowding in public K-12 classrooms and to accommodate projected future enrollment. It will also move more children out of portable classrooms and into permanent facilities. Students housed in new schools and schools modernized using high performing/green school incentive grant funds will benefit from safer schools and a healthier classroom environment. Proposition 1D will allow more students to attend new, state-of-the-art school facilities, and funds for higher education will allow public colleges and universities to improve their facilities and help to ensure that all eligible California students have access to a quality post-secondary education.

The California State PTA also supports **Proposition 86** because by increasing taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products, the use of these harmful products by teens will most likely decline. Additionally, the initiative provides new funding for existing as well as some new tobacco use education, prevention, and cessation programs.

Despite the intentions of the sponsors of **Proposition 88** to increase funding for schools, it is so poorly drafted that it could end up costing many schools more than it would provide.

For full State PTA write-ups about these propositions go to <http://www.capta.org>



REFLECTIONS 2006/2007

Make sure your Unit participates in this years Reflections Program. The 20062007 theme is "My Favorite Place."

Find those students looking for a way to express and show their talents to others as a **photographer, visual artist, writer, composer, choreographer, or film producer?**

Have them think about their favorite place and what it means to them. Then have them create an original piece of artwork in one of six categories:

- ❖ Musical Composition
- ❖ Dance Choreography
- ❖ Film/Video Production
- ❖ Literature
- ❖ Visual Arts
- ❖ Photography

Have your students express their thoughts and creativity, and earn recognition.

To view a gallery of last year's national award-winning entries, visit www.pta.org/reflections06.

Your 1st Place entries for each category are due at the Program Meeting in the Barbara Reilly Center (Apollo Park) on **Monday, December 4th (8:30am)**

Looking forward to seeing your entries!



WHAT IS "OMDR"?

OMDR is the acronym for "Online Membership Database Recording". This is a National PTA membership database that will be mandatory for all Units to participate as of June 2007. However, Thirty-Third District PTA would like all Units to start participating now. The database is designed to give local units a direct pipeline to enter data into the system; making that information available at the local, district, state, and national levels.

This database will allow the California State PTA Board of Managers to communicate with members beyond the local unit presidents and officers. It will also allow National PTA to send communications directly to PTA members. Expanding the membership database will allow all levels of the association to better understand member's needs and interests, target mailings, improve services, and enhance member benefits.

What does this mean to you?

1. Unit Presidents need to make sure that their Membership VP has the MS Excel template that was emailed to them.
2. Get your logon/password (which you will customize after logging on) from Angle Kellogg and your unit number from Stacy Brabant.
3. Download, from Downey Council's website (<http://pta.dusd.net>), the step-by-step OMDR Guide supplied by Thirty-Third District.
4. Type in all membership information using the template (this can be used for your Membership List which a copy is to be given to the Unit Secretary).
5. Then follow the Guide to finish the process.

Your members will receive an initial email or piece of mail asking if they would like PTA information in the future. This is the only communication that your members will get unless they have requested to receive future information. This database is secure and private. It will never be sold or shared with any other organization.

What are the benefits of OMDR?

- **More frequent, targeted communications.**

One great benefit of the database is the collection of members' postal and e-mail addresses, as well as their volunteer roles. Whether your PTA is sending communications (such as electronic newsletters) to all members or targeting important public relations information to local public relations chairs, OMDR will make keeping in contact easier. Your messages will be on target for the audience, inexpensive, and timely.


(OMDR continued)

- **Automatic mailing list generation.** If your PTA is sending a mailing to local PTA members, OMDR is "scrubbed" for current postal addresses-making sure your mailing conforms to USPS regulations, saving you money by not wasting postage, and ensuring that information gets to the right address. If you want a targeted mailing list, OMDR can choose up to 62 different volunteer positions to send your piece to.
- **Solid technology hosted by National PTA, at no cost to you.** National PTA is providing, hosting, and maintaining the new technology for you. You don't need to buy expensive database software to get functionality for local, district, council, and state PTA offices. Purchasing off-the-shelf software to cover your state's local unit database needs could run into hundreds or thousands of dollars-but you get it free through National PTA.
- **Increased communication.** This tool will remove from local presidents the burden of delivering state and national messages to their members. Better information delivery can make members feel that they get more value from their state and national memberships.
- **Remote access.** With the Web-based system, if you have your username and password, data can be accessed remotely. There's no need to haul around disks with membership information; the information can be brought up on any computer with Web access.

One last benefit to note for you who hate to type in data (sometimes the same name for YEARS), once an individual has been listed as a member through the OMDR system you only have to mark them as a returning member next year (no repeat typing). Now **that's** a benefit! Yes?

A THOUGHT FROM YOUR COMMUNITATIONS VP

ATTENTION ALL UNITS...

It is the desire of this individual to be able to write things about each Unit to show how they shine. However, I do need your help.  **PLEASE**... email any information about why your Unit "Shines". Email a copy of your newsletter (or an article or two from your newsletter) to me. Email an "editorial" that you would like to voice. You can also just send information and I will do a write up.

Suggestions:

- Did your Unit get 100% staff support for membership?
- Did you increase your membership numbers?
- Did you do something special with Red Ribbon Week?
- Have you done something special with regards to the "Character Counts" program?
- Did you do an original fundraiser that others could do at their schools?
- Any great Reflection promotions?
- Shining volunteers ~ let us know about them!
- Why is your Unit the best?

So now you ask, "Where do I **Email** my information?" You are sooo smart! Send the information to:

dcpta@hotmail.com

So easy, yes?

Looking forward to hearing from ALL of you!

By: Janet Gera, Correspondence VP

GREAT ARTICLES FROM NATIONAL PTA

Your Role as a Room Parent

By Marci Mohan, Jeanne Palmer, and Peggy Simenson

You volunteered to be a room parent and now you are asking, "What have I gotten myself into?" This is a question thousands of parents ask themselves as the



school year begins. In most cases, though, worries are alleviated when parents gain an understanding of the role room parents play and the expectations teachers have of them.

Teachers today have a tremendous number of responsibilities placed upon them, and often are without enough resources and time to complete all the tasks. Room parents are an invaluable asset in bridging this gap. Teachers appreciate having another person who can correct assignments, create bulletin boards and room decorations, help plan classroom celebrations, work with small groups of students to reinforce skills, and do numerous other tasks that are needed to run an effective classroom.

The first meeting

Since each teacher works with room parents in a different way, good communication at the outset of this relationship is important. Begin establishing a friendly working relationship with the teacher by setting up a meeting. Ask the following questions to better understand the teacher's needs and to help identify your role:

- What is the preferred method of communication: e-mail, phone, or written notes? If schedules must be changed, what's the procedure?
- What is my role: making phone calls, scheduling volunteers, planning parties, correcting papers, helping with field trips?
- How should I handle behavior concerns?
- What time and/or day is best for me to volunteer?
- Where would you like me to work?
- Should I be aware of any medical concerns, such as allergies, among the students?

Traits of the best room parents

Classroom teachers report that effective room parents tend to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Enthusiasm. Showing your enthusiasm sends a message to the children and the teacher that you really want to be there.
- Flexibility. Classroom environments can change very quickly. Understand that the teacher may have to cancel your volunteer time due to an unforeseen conflict.
- Commitment. Since teachers and children count on parent volunteers, it is important to follow through on your commitment.
- Sense of humor. Be ready to laugh.
- Patience. When working with children, you will see a wide range of capabilities. Be patient, and report to the teacher any specific struggles or successes.
- Independence. If the teacher is unable to give you instructions when you first enter the classroom, walk around the room, observe, and help students until the teacher can talk with you. Teachers say the best type of room parent is the one that sees what needs to be done and then does it.
- Confidentiality. Volunteer work in the classroom is always confidential and should be kept between the teacher and the volunteer. If you have concerns about something you see or hear at the school, speak privately with the teacher or, if appropriate, the principal.
- Ability to communicate effectively. Report to the teacher any observations regarding students' academic work or behavior that you feel are important.

Parents who are involved in their children's education know that a great way to be supportive is to be active partners with their children's schools and classrooms. Being a room parent provides an opportunity to do this. So whether you are correcting papers, making phone calls, or doing any other of the numerous jobs you may encounter as a volunteer, remember that the time you spend as a room parent will show your child that you value and support his or her education.

Marci Mohan, Jeanne Palmer, and Peggy Simenson are teachers and have all served as room parents. They are the authors of Parties with Pizzazz: A Complete Resource for Holiday Classroom Parties (Pizzazz Publishing, 2004); visit www.pizzazzpublishing.com for more information.

Raising Active Thinkers: Practical Suggestions for Parents of Young Children

By Joan Franklin Smutny

Many parents want to know how to nurture the “thinking life” of their children during the preprimary and primary years. The motivation

for this is not always to help their children excel in school, desirable as that may be. Often, the motivation is to instill in their children a love for learning and an ability to think that will become resilient enough to endure the pressures and influences of school and society.

Parents are keenly aware of the powerful forces that compete with a young child’s ability to think. The focus in school on competition and getting ahead, for example, often pulls the attention of young students away from exploring the world around them to the mind-numbing pursuit of “A” grades and “right” answers. Tele-vision and the Internet—when misused—can also depress curiosity, questioning, and the creative impulse. Older children, who plunk themselves down in front of screens that dazzle the eye and blast the ear, often attract the younger ones to electronic media at a time when these young children most need to feed their minds and senses with the imaginatively rich resources of art, music, and story, or the exquisite beauty and wonder of the natural world.

Fostering in young children the strength and ability to “think their own thoughts” (as one parent put it) needs to begin early. During the preprimary and primary years, children touch, taste, and shape whatever they can get their hands on. The sound of Canada geese honking and the sight of them streaking across the sky awe children; the feel of kneading bread and the smell of yeast prompt a dozen questions. These incidents are part of the thinking life of young children.



Consider the home environment

The first place to look for ways to stimulate thinking in young children is the home environment itself. Step back and consider your home from the perspective of learning and thinking, and of your child’s special interests and talents. Does your home invite your child to explore, create, and think? Here are some important points to consider:

- Spaces for thinking and doing. Review the different rooms in your home through the lens of your child’s thinking and learning needs. Consider visual stimuli (colors, shapes, designs, etc.), aural stimuli (music, environmental sounds, etc.), tactile stimuli (textures—smooth, rough, rounded, puffy, hard, etc.), and atmosphere (calm, active, hectic, electronic buzz, etc.). Consider the spaces for quiet reading, for family activities, and for the display of family creations, awards, etc. (the family gallery).
- The role of television. Although television can be educational and valuable at times, most television programs produce a spectator mode of consciousness in the viewer and depress active thinking. If the television occupies a prominent place in your home, you and your family might want to think about giving it a less dominant role in your living space.
- Materials. The home environment should feed the senses of young children. Think about their spaces in terms of things to see, hear, touch, smell, and manipulate. Examples of materials that can stimulate the senses include art materials; images of famous paintings and children’s books about artists; classical music, folk music, and books about composers; costumes, masks (made by the children), and wigs; magnifying glasses designed for young children; nature magazines and books about birds, insects, fish, and mammals; recordings of the sounds of nature; terrariums; sketch pads and notebooks for journals; construction materials (this can include anything safe that you might have in your attic or basement); magnets; puzzles; games; and science kits.
- Nature. The natural world provides an enormous range of opportunities for observing, sensing, touching, measuring, and analyzing. Consider ways that your home can connect your child to nature. Plants are an obvious choice. Also try using dried grasses, rocks and shells collected by the family, feathers, and acorns. Have your child create artwork from outdoor materials.

(“*Raising Active...*” continued)

The home environment is created not just by the physical design but by how the people live in it. Parents and other family members can find opportunities for thinking in all areas of daily life—from the mundane (e.g., shopping at the hardware store) to the profound (e.g., looking at the stars). In a “thinking home,” two conditions often stand out:

1. An atmosphere of open questioning. The family frequently raises and discusses open-ended, explorative questions about many subjects (e.g., How many different things can be made with acorns, sticks, pinecones, and glue? Is it possible to begin a story with the ending and work back to the beginning?). In such an environment, children develop the habit of inquiry early.
2. Fun projects to do and think about. The family encourages its members to develop interests and pursue their ideas, however unusual those ideas may be (e.g., creating a story series based on randomly arranged prints, sketching an invention for a self-cleaning fish tank).

Explore, question, and create—with your child

Supporting your child’s thinking ability involves doing things with her, rather than giving her something to do and then watching her. Although young children certainly learn things on their own, their interactions and discussions with adults prompt them to explore new ideas, probe for answers to their questions, and think. For example, a father teaches his son about plants in the garden and helps him create his own mini garden. The child asks questions about the different plants; they discuss the possibilities, visit nurseries, look at garden magazines, create designs, and experiment. This is the best sort of learning activity because it gives the child new, interesting things to think about and at the same time enables him to develop some mastery in a subject (in this case botany, climate, and soil science).

Thinking activities can be especially helpful when they evolve into family traditions. I know a family of amateur naturalists who love to look up the different species of flora and fauna in species guides; they sketch the species and write journal entries, stories, and poems about their experiences. When I last saw their collection, they had an extraordinary record of their lives along coastlines, in mountainous regions, in the plains, and along rivers—a record accompanied by sketches, photographs, maps, and even poems. The most avid contributor is a 7-year-old girl.

Here is a sampling of thinking activities you and your family can do (or adapt) together:

- Spend a little time each day doing a dramatic reading of a book; each person should take a turn reading a chapter or section. This could develop into theatrical experiences later on.
- Use paintings, magazines, prints, or photographs as catalysts for creative writing or storytelling. Explore questions: What happened just before this scene? What do you think exists beyond the borders of this picture? Put yourself in the picture. Let the picture speak to you. What do you see, feel, and hear?
- Start collections from the outdoor world: rocks, pinecones, birds’ nests, pressed leaves or flowers, shells, etc. From these, a variety of projects can emerge: stories about these phenomena; sculptures; diagrams; poems; dramatizations; nature journals; etc.
- Go on regular trips to museums, ecology centers, aquariums, etc., and focus on a specific exhibit and/or topic. Each family member should bring at least one question to the experience. For example, on a trip to see the works of Neo-Impressionist artists, a young child might want to learn how Pointillism works.

Nurturing in young children an ability to think openly and deeply about the world around them has profound and long-term consequences for their lives. Ideally, this kind of nurturing should be a way of life for the whole family rather than a series of isolated events for the child. In a thinking home, young children can sense the adventures that await them and feel within themselves the resources they need to take the first steps.

Joan Franklin Smutny has written 13 books on gifted children and is the director of The Center for Gifted at National-Louis University in Evanston, Illinois.

ARTICLES FROM STATE PTA'S "THE COMMUNICATOR"

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW - AND DO - ABOUT HOMEWORK?

1. While it sounds like a no-brainer, knowing the purpose of homework is critical in providing the help your son or daughter needs to get the most out of it. First of all, you need to know the purpose of homework from the teacher who assigns it. Is homework used to finish work begun at school, to provide more practice with new skills, or to complete large-scale projects?



Next, sort out the reasons you want your young adolescent to complete homework. Is it to help develop discipline and a productive work ethic?

Finally, frequently speak with your children about the importance of homework, whatever the reasons, so they understand why they are doing it.

2. Details do count — and so does consistency. Work with your young adolescent to set a regular time, place, and duration for homework to be done — not in front of the TV and not during commercial breaks. **When is the best time for homework to be completed** — right after school, before supper, or after supper? Is it important for quiet hours to be enforced, or can your son or daughter work while listening to music? Setting a quiet and undisturbed place to do homework is important.

3. Who's responsible? The young adolescent whose homework is in question must be responsible — always. But, it is up to parents to help until this process is firmly in place. Sit down with your young adolescent and make a list of ground rules together. If he or she is not forthcoming with assignments, you must get this information from the teachers. Don't do the homework for your young adolescents, but do have them explain to you what they are doing and what they have learned from the homework.

4. Reading is always an appropriate homework assignment. So, if your son or daughter has no homework, finishes early, or simply doesn't have anything else to do, he should be reading. Family members can be excellent role models by making sure that the entire household reads regularly. This will help your young adolescent develop his or her own reading habit. Keep the TV off most of the evening, turning it on only for specific shows, if that.

*The Family Connection Newsletter
National Middle School Association*

5 COMPONENTS OF READING

Reading with children and helping them practice specific reading components can dramatically improve their ability to read. Scientific research shows that there are five essential components of reading that children must be taught in order to learn to read. Adults can help children learn to be good readers by systematically practicing these five components:

- Recognizing and using individual sounds to create words, or **phonemic awareness**. Children need to be taught to hear sounds in words and those words are made up of the smallest parts of sound, or phonemes.
- Understanding the relationships between written letters and spoken sounds, or **phonics**. Children need to be taught the sounds individual printed letters and groups of letters make. Knowing the relationships between letters and sounds helps children to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically, and "decode" new words.
- Developing the ability to read a text accurately and quickly, or **reading fluency**. Children must learn to read words rapidly and accurately in order to understand what is read. When fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically. When fluent readers read aloud, they read effortlessly and with expression. Readers who are weak in fluency read slowly, word by word, focusing on decoding words instead of comprehending meaning.
- Learning the meaning and pronunciation of words, or **vocabulary development**. Children need to actively build and expand their knowledge of written and spoken words, what they mean and how they are used.
- Acquiring strategies to understand, remember and communicate what is read, or **reading comprehension strategies**. Children need to be taught comprehension strategies, or the steps good readers use to make sure they understand text. Students who are in control of their own reading comprehension become purposeful, active readers.



DOWNEY COUNCIL DATA

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DATES TO REMEMBER



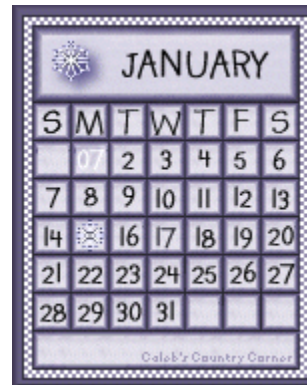
December 3rd: Downey Holiday Parade

December 4th:

- 8:30am Programmed Meeting ~ Riley Center at Apollo Park
- All 1st Place Reflection Entries Due
- Sacramento Safari registration due to Council PTA

December 12th: City of Downey Big Birthday Bash at city council meeting at 7:30 pm

December 18 to January 2: Winter Break



January 8th: Downey Council PTA meeting at 6 pm at PTA room at Apollo Park

January 10th: Coffee with the Superintendent at 9:30 at the DUSD offices

January 15th: Holiday, Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday

January 16th: Downey Board of Education meeting at 5 pm at DUSD offices

January 25th: Mid Winter Conferences, 33rd District PTA]

January 30th: Parent Education Workshop: Getting Ready for Kindergarten