

Upon returning from Washington DC, Kate McMullen summed up her impressions of the organizational meeting of the National Congress of Mothers in a report to her women's club.

“Mothers, put into your own lives just as much of the ideal as you can, that the little ones living with you and watching you daily, may have their object lesson constantly before them. We must not, however, stop with our own children, but reach out a helping hand to those who through no fault of their own are neglected and dependent.”

On May 30, 1900 some 300 women and a few men gathered to form the Illinois Congress of Mothers as a branch of the National Congress of Mothers in Evanston, Illinois. With the aid of local women's clubs, educators, and legal expert, Mrs. McMullen organized the Illinois Congress of Mothers and was elected its first president. Although some of the present committees had their beginnings then, the first years were devoted largely to organizing Mothers' Clubs throughout the state. Some of these became member-clubs, while others, including women's clubs, “affiliated” with the Illinois PTA, a practice discontinued in 1929.

Milestones during our long history focused on providing resources to parents, increasing membership, the implementation of programs and advocating for legislation to address issue affecting children. Here are some highlights.

1900- 1950

Loan libraries were established, giving mother's access to a wide range of helpful books as well as cooking classes.

Local charters were supported through conferences and a state handbook first published in 1906. In 1917, Illinois PTA Bulletin began publication. It's articles authored by state board members and cooperating agencies offered continuous help and resources to local PTAs.

A unique part of our history occurred during World War I. Outstanding work was the operation from 1917 to 1921 of “The Jolly Tar” in an old mansion in Waukegan. This club for sailors on liberty from the Great Lakes Naval Station was unique in the country for its homelike atmosphere.

During the great depression PTA joined with the Illinois State Teachers Association to form the Joint Committee on Education. A Save our Schools committee was formed. It assisted in restoring some of the cut backs in education. (1931 -1934).

Programs to address children's health needs were initiated. A Summer Round up Program was undertaken which provided health examinations to children entering school. (1926). A diphtheria prevention campaign was undertaken with many children being immunized.

Hot Lunch programs at schools were facilitated by local units across the state.

Illinois PTA worked to secure passage of legislation such as improved child labor laws, new adoption laws, increased funds for education, establishing Kindergarten and special training for handicapped children.

1950 – 2000

Illinois PTA stayed true to the mission of the association and continued to address the needs of children and families,

To alleviate the critical post-war teacher shortage the criteria for the Illinois PTA Scholarship program was changed only provide for students entering the field of education. This was the beginning of the Golden Jubilee Scholarship Program (1950).

Issues of support included improved standards for certification of teachers, adequate salaries for teachers and a non-partisan state board of education. Work entailed urging the establishment of a four year branch of the University of Illinois In Chicago and protesting against an insufficient appropriation to the Common School Fund (1954 -1958).

Leadership workshops were continually updated and presented to provide current information to local units.

Legislative activities encompassed topics relevant to families. Illinois PTA developed partnerships with like minded groups to address issues. As the status of our environment became a concern Illinois PTA joined efforts with Citizens for clean water in support of an Anti pollution Bond act. (1968)

Caring about the mental health of children, three conferences were held in the state to emphasize the primary role of family, school and home relations and community as a way to address prevention and early treatment of emotional problems.

We joined with others to oppose state aid to non public schools and urged members to go to the polls and vote for the 1970 Illinois Constitution. Illinois PTA hosted the state superintendant of public instruction cosponsoring 1500 coffees during American Education week. (1973)

Programing ideas to promote the arts and addressed concerns over television was shared with local units. Beginning in 1980 and continuing to the present, the Illinois PTA and its local units have participated in the National PTA's Reflections arts program, which provides awards for children's original work in the areas of visual arts, photography, music composition, and literature. Working with a cable company TV Critical Viewing workshops were presented throughout communities in Illinois. (1982)

Advocacy continued to be one of the most important functions of the Illinois PTA. Changes in the school code and laws pertaining to child abuse were addressed. (1984)

By 1987 abolishment of corporal punishment for children misbehaving in school became law. An issue strongly long advocated for by the membership.

Legislative Conferences have been a feature in the 1990s. PTA Advocacy Days in Springfield give local unit members an opportunity to speak directly to their legislators on issues considered critical by the PTA.

In 1996 and 1997, the Illinois PTA chaired a coalition of child advocacy groups that held Parent Marches on Springfield to urge adequate funding of education, and a revision of the state income tax laws to more equitably fund education. About 5,000 parents and other citizens attended each of these events.

With the 90s came the buzz words parent involvement. As a relevant resource a series of events to promote the National PTA Standards for Parent and Family involvement were sponsored. A statewide conference was held to prepare all learners for careers and lifelong learning.

The Report on The Placement and Care of Children in Substitute Care and Juvenile Court System was adopted. This document has given the Illinois PTA the opportunity to advocate children in foster care as well as the Juvenile Justice system.

2000 – Present

Our mission still guides us today. We continue to serve on many committees on the Illinois State Board of Education; cooperating agencies and other governmental bodies. Sharing resources on the new learning standards, Family Engagement, health and safety issues effecting children and school funding. We continue to monitor activity in Springfield and Washington DC to assist our members in being a strong voice for children.

Our history is filled with many wonderful accomplishments and continuing battles. The Illinois PTA One Hundred Years for Children has more in depth details. Please contact our state office regarding this resource 217-523-2811, info@illinoispta.org.

If you are interested in receiving additional information on PTA or forming a PTA in your school or community please call the Illinois PTA state office at 217-523-2811.