



## "How to Conduct... Program & Project" Series It's as Easy as 1, 2, 3!

Number 1

Adapted from National PTA Nuts & Bolts #10

Founders Day

# How to Conduct a Founders Day Program

## Step 1



### *Step 1: Learn about the program.*

#### **What is Founders Day?**

Founders Day, February 17, commemorates the first convention of the National Congress of Mothers, held February 17-19, 1897, in Washington, D.C. Each

February, PTAs nationwide pay special tribute to Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst, co-founders of the National Congress of Mothers, eventually called the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, or PTA. We also remember Selena Sloan Bulter, who in 1926 founded the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers, which united with the National PTA in 1970.

In 1910 Mrs. David O. Mears, one of the original members of the Congress, suggested that Founders Day should always be observed as a significant anniversary by the National Congress – and everyone concerned with the needs of children and youth. Each year since then PTA members have honored the Founders. And, through the Founders Day gift, they have helped to ensure ever stronger and more effective local, state, and national parent-teacher action for children.

#### **The PTA Founders**

**ALICE MCLELLAN BIRNEY** (1858-1907) was a co-founder of the National Congress of Mothers, which later became the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, or National PTA.

She was born in Marietta, Georgia, completed high school at 15, and attended Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. At 18, she married Alonzo J. White, a lawyer from Charleston, South Carolina. He died within the year, leaving her an expectant mother. While rearing her daughter, Mrs. Birney studied medicine. When financial difficulties forced her to abandon this course and earn a living, she entered the advertising business and was an unqualified success.

Fourteen years following White's death, she married Theodore Weld Birney, a lawyer practicing in Washington, D.C. They had two daughters.

Extremely well-read and sensitive to the needs of the less fortunate, Mrs. Birney aspired to build a better world for children. With her husband's support, she first presented her plan at an adult education center in Chautauqua, New York, in 1895. Then, in 1897, she met Phoebe Apperson Hearst, who helped her transform her plan into a reality. It was a success from the start.

Mrs. Birney served as president of the new organization until 1902.

**PHOEBE APPERSON HEARST** (1842-1919) helped to establish the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, which later became the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, or National PTA.

Born to pioneering parents in Franklin County, Missouri, she attended a one-room log cabin school. She completed her education in St. James and became a teacher at the age of 16. In St. James, she met and married George Hearst of San Francisco and moved to California. The fortune Hearst built enabled Mrs. Hearst to transform many of her dreams into realities.

Mrs. Hearst was especially concerned about school training for the very young. As a parent of one son and as a teacher, she realized that a child's early education could determine his entire future. In 1883 she founded one of the first free kindergartens, which she supported with her time and money. She formed seven in all—first in San Francisco, and then in Washington, D.C., where the Hearsts later lived.

When her husband died and she took control of his empire, education remained her foremost interest, for she believed that only through education could there be a lasting improvement in human welfare.

**SELENA SLOAN BUTLER** was the founder and first president of the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT). The NCCPT was formed to function in states that legally mandated segregation. In 1970 the congress

united with the National PTA. Today, Mrs. Butler is considered a co-founder of the National PTA.

Mrs. Butler, mother, teacher, and wife of the outstanding physician, Dr. Henry R. Butler of Atlanta, Georgia, was a pioneer in the work of the improvement of racial relations especially the rights of children. In spite of National Congress of Parents and Teachers mission to protect the rights of all children irrespective of color, Mrs. Butler believed more needed to be done.

In 1919, Butler dedicated her life to forming an organization which would have the same objectives as the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. She wrote several letters encouraging parents and teachers of color to form a union with the primary purpose of uniting home and school into a planned program for child welfare. Her letters stimulated interest in the parent-teacher movement and her own state Georgia became the first to organize. By 1926, Mrs. Butler aroused sufficient interest and issued the first call for convention. To this call, four states responded and sent delegates.

Her letter writing technique inspired President Hoover to appoint her to serve on his 1929 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection representing the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers and working on the Committee on *The Infant and Pre-School Child*, whose work contributed to the writing of the *Children's Chapter*.

Mrs. Butler lived to enjoy and participate actively in the work of this organization for more than thirty years.

### What Is the Free-Will Offering?

A special tradition of PTA Founders Day is the Founders Day gift, a free-will cash offering collected at the Founders Day meeting or an item that's budgeted in advance by your PTA. Your PTA treasurer forwards your gift to the state PTA, which keeps half and sends the other half to the National PTA.

Both state and National PTA use the Founders Day gift to provide services that honor the spirit of the founders' original ideals. Your local unit's gift, multiplied by similar gifts across the state and the nation, helps both state and National PTAs provide program-planning materials, workshops and leadership training, among other benefits. This is usually the only time during the year that a monetary donation is collected.

## Step 2: Plan and publicize the program.



### Ideas for Founders Day

Founders Day is a time to reflect on your PTA's achievements, examine its current concerns and set goals for the future. The ways to observe Founders Day are limited only by your imagination; there is no one "right" way to celebrate.

Keep in mind that one of the objectives of Founders Day meetings and activities is to increase understanding of the purpose and scope of PTA work – on local, state and national levels. So it's easy to see that Founders Day activities can be tied in with membership promotion.

Here are some ideas to get you started in planning your Founders Day events:

- Review your membership list to see which parents and teachers haven't yet joined PTA. Personally invite them, through phone calls or individual letters, to attend your Founders Day celebration and become part of PTA's efforts.
- Is your community particularly concerned about an issue affecting children and youth, for example, alcohol and other drug use, teen pregnancy or AIDS? Focus your meeting on that issue, and ask the entire community to attend. Consider having a panel discussion that includes experts in the field, parents, teachers and students.
- Hold a viewing of *Voices of the PTA*, a fast-paced video that tells the story of the National PTA and discusses the programs it offers.
- Showcase students' Reflections projects at your meeting – and don't forget to make students feel welcome to attend!
- Request that your town's mayor issue a proclamation in honor of PTA's birthday. Invite the mayor to bring his or her family to your meeting and sign the proclamation during a special ceremony.
- Create a photo collage that highlights events in the history of your PTA. Distribute a list of your PTA's achievements, as well as those of the National PTA (found in the "Programs" section of the National PTA Annual Resources Book).
- Order *The PTA Story: A Century of Commitment to Children*. This beautiful, coffee-table edition tells the PTA story, from its founding in 1897 to its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1997. It contains 172 pages and over 200 photos of incredible PTA history. It is available online at [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org) for \$29.95.
- Start a "PTA Hall of Fame" for persons who have made significant contributions to your PTA. Make a decorative bulletin board that features photos of inductees and descriptions of their achievements. This can be the beginning of a tradition that your PTA adds to each year.
- Candle ceremonies are impressive and inspirational. One idea is to light a candle for each National PTA founder while reaffirming the purposes of the PTA. You may also want to light candles for your PTA's founders, past presidents or life members. Ask these noteworthy people to participate in your ceremony, and present them with a gift of appreciation. (PTA promotional items are perfect for the occasion. Order through the state PTA office.)

- Recognize people who have distinguished themselves in service to children and youth by bestowing honorary life memberships. Honorary Life Membership forms are found in the Georgia PTA Leadership Handbook or on the Georgia PTA web site, [www.georgiapta.org](http://www.georgiapta.org).
- Acknowledge outstanding members of your faculty, administration and school staff who have gone the extra mile for PTA, and be sure to highlight the contributions teachers have made to your school and community. Original songs, poems and drawings are a great way to say “thanks.”
- Present a skit about the founding of the National PTA. Write the skit yourself or call the state PTA office.
- Have your students at your school produce a video or slide show about school activities, and show the finished product at your meeting.
- Set up a table to display program planning kits, legislative materials, posters, brochures and the many other useful publications produced by the National PTA (download from National PTA’s web site, [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org) or call the state office).
- Provide a membership table so those persons who have not yet joined PTA can enroll.

### Organizing Founders Day Events

Your Founders Day program can be planned by either the regular program chairperson and committee or a specific Founders Day chairperson and committee. If you choose a special committee, be sure it coordinates efforts with the regular program committee.

#### Before the meeting

- Collect and study information on Founders Day. You can find sections on Founders Day in back issues of *Our Children* (particularly December/January and February issues), back issues of your local and state newsletters, and the historical record book for your unit. The previous Founders Day committee chairperson, your PTA president and the state office should also have Founders Day materials.
- Early in the school year, confer with the program committee and executive board to plan for Founders Day. Remember, there is no set way to celebrate; you should choose an event that will interest *your* community.
- Create a new and meaningful way to collect the Founders Day gift. Some PTAs have used wishing wells and miniature schoolhouses. Make sure the purpose of the gift is clear.
- Mail invitations to past presidents and honored guests four weeks ahead of your celebration. Follow up mailed invitations with personal contact, offering transportation if needed.

- Plan with the hospitality committee for any special decorations, name tags, flowers, or refreshments. Some units serve birthday cake, but your arrangements need not be lavish or expensive.
- Arrange to greet guests and introduce them to your members. Alert your guests in advance if they are expected to participate in the program in any way.
- Prepare a program sheet and any other handouts, and be sure you have enough for everyone.

#### Getting the Word Out

Publicizing your Founders Day celebration will help ensure its success. Remember, this is an excellent opportunity to attract new members and supporters, and you should use every publicity outlet available. Your publicity efforts should use PTA’s anniversary as a starting point but should go further, emphasizing PTA’s successes and goals. Here are some ways to let the community know about your celebration.

- Have your PR chairperson book a PTA spokesperson on local radio and television public affairs shows to discuss current local, state and National PTA projects, as well as the importance of involvement.
- Send public service announcements (PSAs) to local radio and television stations. The PSAs should emphasize PTA’s achievements and the benefits of membership.
- Send press releases to the media, alerting them to your meeting’s noteworthy attendees and events.
- Submit feature story ideas to your local newspapers. Examples might be a profile of the oldest living past PTA president; a look at how single parents, working parents, fathers, students and older citizens are getting involved in the PTA; or a history of your PTA and its achievements. Be sure to give at least two weeks’ lead time.
- Contact the photo editors at your local newspapers to inform them of any special photo opportunities at your event. If the papers can’t send photographers, take your own black-and-white photos and ask whether the newspapers would like copies.
- Write letters to the editors of your local newspapers, emphasizing the achievements of PTA and encouraging community members to attend the Founders Day meeting and join your PTA’s efforts.
- Inform members of special activities through articles in your newsletter, fliers, posters and telephone calls.
- Place an ad in your local newspapers the week or day before your meeting, inviting the whole community to attend.

### Step 3: Conduct and evaluate the program.



#### At the Meeting

Have greeters at the door to meet special guests such as past presidents, new members, etc.

Encourage everyone to join PTA. Share past accomplishments of the PTA. Use the *National PTA Milestones* listed below.

#### National PTA Milestones

- 1897** Founding of the National Congress of Mothers to act on behalf of children in the home, at school, and in the world.
- 1898-99** The Congress promotes cooperation between parents and teachers; advocates for sex education; and lobbies for a national health bureau.
- 1900s** Fathers urged to join; PTA already voicing public concern for juvenile justice issues and the need for child labor laws, as well as federal aid to schools.
- 1910s** PTA urges that kindergarten be part of education system; asks parents to supervise their children's attendance at moving pictures; local PTAs serve hot lunches to children.
- 1920s** The National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers is formed to serve children in segregated states; PTA begins a nationwide children's health project; and is involved in the first university courses in school-home relations.
- 1930s** A special nutrition project and emergency services prevent children from suffering during the Great Depression; PTA studies automobile and school bus safety as they relate to children.
- 1940s** PTA launches nationwide school lunch program; becomes one of the first non-governmental organizations to support the establishment of the United Nations; creates new university project to teach teachers home-school relations; wartime activities include the weekly radio series, "The Family in War", featuring the Baxter family and a panel of experts discussing the episode.
- 1950s** PTA calls a national conference to address narcotics and drug addiction in youth; helps field-test and win support for the Salk Polio Vaccine; and promotes health supervision of children from early childhood through high school.
- 1960s** PTA creates public message about the dangerous effects of smoking; helps enact child protection and toy safety legislation; promotes art education via a nationwide cultural arts program; and creates a new focus on home-school relations in low-income areas.
- 1970s** National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers and National Congress of Parents and Teachers unite to become one organization; PTA expands outreach to combat alcohol abuse; calls for parents to share in decision making in schools; begins project to oppose violence on television; opens Office of Governmental Relations in Washington, DC; and invites students to sit on the National PTA Board of Directors.
- 1980s** PTA fights for automobile safety belt and child restraint legislation; creates a drug/alcohol abuse prevention project; focuses more attention on children and families in the inner

cities; and creates national HIV/AIDS education program for parents.

#### 1990s

PTA convenes national summit on parent involvement; becomes major force in adding parent involvement to National Education Goals; develops National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals; initiates nationwide campaign to protect children from violence; forges partnerships with other national groups to promote parent involvement in early childhood education and teacher education; celebrates 100th anniversary.

#### Sample Founders Day Inspiration

##### Happy Birthday, PTA

Over one hundred years has passed  
Since our Founders accepted the task  
Of standing for children and leading the way  
By committing themselves to the future that day.

How could they have known  
What an impact they'd make  
As they rallied together  
For all children's sake.

Health, Education and Safety  
Were the issues they wanted addressed  
To raise the standards for children  
Our Founders would ask for none less.

Our children can't wait for tomorrow  
Was the message delivered that day  
Encouraging others to speak with one voice  
For the future, with all of them lay.

Promoting the welfare of children  
Was the dream that lighted their way  
Our Founders believed that the future secure  
Was a place where a difference was made.

As we look at all they accomplished  
And how they've inspired us all  
We know that forever all children were touched  
By those who had answered the call.

So, Selena, Phoebe and Alice  
We honor on this special day  
Let us raise one voice for all children  
And commit to the future today.

-Patricia Lancaster, Florida PTA

#### After the Meeting

- Be sure the treasurer immediately forwards the Founders Day gift through regular financial channels. No motion or vote is necessary for this action.
- Follow up with thank-you notes to program participants.
- Save samples of press releases, program invitation, newspaper clippings, etc., for your unit's historical record.
- Prepare a report of activities, evaluation, feedback and suggestions to next year's chairman for your unit's procedure book.