



The 'A' word

Much of the current debate surrounding education reform forsakes a pedagogical agenda and the political morass obscures the merits of a free and appropriate public education. Meanwhile, the fate of our children's education dangles in the balance. One million Massachusetts public school children cannot wait for the political dust to settle; they need us to speak up for their needs – now.

Mr. Gass is right to draw attention to the difference between the Parent Teacher Association and other parent groups (Herald, Op-Ed, August 19). When you become a member of PTA you become associated and connected to a network of over 5 million members. All parent groups have a local component – a way for passionate, dedicated parents to get involved in K-12 schools. Many of the other groups, however, focus solely on fundraising.

While fundraising for items not covered by school budgets is an important component for school groups, PTA knows that parents are interested and concerned in other school issues as well. Key issues such as speaking up for every child, sharing power, and collaborating with community are three of six pillars of effective family-school partnerships championed by PTA. In contrast to other parent groups, PTA parents have a broader role to play beyond fundraising in the education of their children.

With that kind of mission and scope, it is not surprising Mr. Gass prefers a narrow image of parents, as if content to be the fundraising arm of the Department of Education. Exactly how many bake sales and school fairs does Mr. Gass expect parents and caregivers to organize in order to make up for devastating federal cuts in education we have witnessed in recent years?

Even now, at the state level, no less than three pieces of charter school legislation await debate by the Legislature and an engaged public. PTA will be there advocating for what our children need most. That's right - PTA. The difference is advocacy.

*Mary Ann Stewart,
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