

On Wednesday, April 25th, I joined nearly 2,000 Massachusetts residents on the Boston Common for a School Funding Rally co-sponsored by Massachusetts PTA and Stand for Children. Marian Wright Edelman addressed the crowd about the moral imperative of caring for our most vulnerable people - our children. Many parents from across the state delivered heartfelt speeches about the growing challenges our public schools face due to underfunding by the state. I was asked to give a speech that stressed the importance of collaboration and organization. I was the last person to speak before Governor Deval Patrick addressed the crowd. Since then, many people have asked me for a copy of the speech I gave that day and teachers, who could not attend the rally on a school day, asked if I might print it in the Herald - so here it is. ~Mary Ann Stewart.

Government mandates. Shrinking budgets. Increased class sizes. Curriculum cuts. Public schools today are challenged to provide every child with opportunities to meet their educational needs. Budgets are tight but government requirements - and children's needs - are growing.

The state of Massachusetts and local communities, with the federal government as a critical third partner, have a shared responsibility for maintaining public schools and assuring that all children have equitable access to a high-quality public education. Across Massachusetts, schools lack resources for critical programs they need to reduce the achievement gap and to overcome barriers to learning that threaten the quality of education for every child and leave our most vulnerable children behind.

Today we are here to keep the promise of public education alive, to renew our partnership with our policymakers, and to promote a more fruitful collaboration on behalf of every child in every public school in every Massachusetts city and town.

The Parent Teacher Association is the oldest child advocacy organization in the country. I'm a parent of three school-age children in the Lexington public schools and I'm here as a proud member of both Massachusetts PTA & Stand for Children because we are all dedicated to building community and statewide partnerships that work for our schools and our children. Being a member of our national and state PTA accomplishes great things:

- Last year, I was one of four Massachusetts PTA board members to lobby our Massachusetts delegation in Washington DC for increased public school funding and for improved school health, nutrition, and safety.
- Last month, I joined educational leaders in a meeting with Senator Kennedy about the *No Child Left Behind Act*.
- And this year - for the first time - there will be a parent representative on the Massachusetts Board of Education - the result of twelve years of effort and advocacy by Massachusetts PTA.

The parent partnership includes our legislators - letting them know how they can make a difference, and showing up to advocate for resources - as you have done today.

Yes - parent involvement is about partnering with our child's teachers - and yes - it's also about packing healthy lunches and monitoring screen time and supporting our children's activities - but that's not the whole picture. We all need to work together - beyond the classroom and school - to help our schools get the resources they need to

fulfill the promise that public education holds for every child.

Albert Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

As members of Stand & PTA we have a unified voice that tells our legislators what is important to us - and that's why we are all here today.

Advocacy is like an ever-flowing river – one that you can step into at any place, at any time. And whether you choose to dip your toe in at the edge of the calm shore - or wade all the way into the deep - your presence has already changed the course.

Now, we must make our voices heard for our children ... all of our voices together, in concert ... one voice ... plus his voice ... with her voice and your voice ... one voice for children in schools ... at town meetings ... and yes, even at the state legislature.

Our children deserve no less.