

# FAIRFIELD PTA COUNCIL

An Open Letter to the School Parents of Fairfield,

The arrival of Labor Day and the start of the new school year is a good time for the parent community to reflect on what it takes to educate the children of Fairfield. When we think about what is truly involved, we realize that it is not a simple job. From the children themselves, to us, their parents, to the school system everyone has their work cut out for them.

The job for a child is a tricky one. On a daily basis our children must absorb and interpret new concepts thrown at them by parents, teachers and friends, not to mention from TV and the Internet. And, if that weren't hard enough, they must sort through the mixed messages they receive from each one. Trying to make sense of their world, they test their boundaries while trying hard to live up to the expectations we place on them.

The job for a parent is a demanding one. It is our responsibility to help our children find their best path through life. In this confusing world we strive to give them the skills and experiences they will need to deal with it and to mature into well-rounded people. We are their first and best teacher, their life's guide and their personal advocate. Daily, we must fight battles on their behalf, sometimes with the very children we are trying to help. With all our worry about the decisions we make, concerns about the unknowns of their future and fretting over events not in our control it's a wonder we get any sleep at night.

The job for our schools is a challenging one. They are asked to take thousands of children of different ability levels, backgrounds, emotional development and culture, meld them together and educate them. The education they are asked to provide is expected to be high quality, relevant, interesting and targeted to the individual child's needs, ability level, background, emotional development and culture. Ultimately it must prepare them to go to college and/or get a job. The schools are expected to do this in an environment where social and political pressures often result in attempts at micro management by politicians and members of the public at large, cuts in budget and if we're not careful, cuts in valuable programs and services.

The job for the PTA is a vital one. It is to make the jobs of the children, their parents and our schools a little easier. Our mission statement says it best:

- **To support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, the community and before government bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children.**
- **To assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children.**
- And, perhaps most importantly, **To encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation.**

It is through strong parental involvement in the schools that we are able to maintain a high level of educational opportunity for all students and a high level of academic achievement by those students. When parents work together as active liaisons between the children, the school and the community everyone achieves more.

In the September 1999 issue of LIFE magazine, which focused on education in the U.S., one of the conclusions reached by author Charles Hirschberg in his article *How Good Are Our Schools?* was "...for schools to get better, we need more active parents. The more involved parents get in education - their own children's and the nation's - the better our schools will become."

The Fairfield Public School system values parent participation in their children's education. Their Family Involvement Policy is very much in sync with the mission of the PTA and gives support to the following:

- **Encouraging family participation in their child's education in school and at home.**
- **Promoting communication between school and home regarding the instructional program and students.**
- **Providing assistance to families in developing parenting skills, which benefit their child at home and increase achievement at school.**
- **Soliciting opinions from families on system-wide and individual school issues.**
- **Inviting families to participate in the education of children by assuming volunteer support roles at school.**

They recognize that it is the partnership between parents and the schools that is crucial to a successful education system and successful students.

One Fairfield High School administrator brought home the need for parents to be strong participants in their children's education when he wrote, "I have asked some successful seniors how they avoided making the really big and disastrous mistakes that some young people make. The common response 100% of the time is that they felt an obligation to their parents." He goes on to point out that it was because of their parents sacrifices over the years in support of their academic and extracurricular endeavors that the students felt that they couldn't let their parents down.

It is through a strong PTA that we parents have the best means of becoming and staying involved. Through PTA programs and volunteerism we come together around the institution of our local school to support one another, our children and their education. We have the opportunity to share our views and information, to have our views heard by the administration and other governmental bodies, and to work together as a united force for the betterment of our school system and all our children.

In the month of September our PTAs run their membership drives and we urge you to join. Membership is our strength, which is reflected in our motto- **Everychild. Onevoice.** Together we accomplish some amazing things for our kids, so please take a moment to contact your units Membership Chairperson.

However, your membership is only the start. Your further involvement is needed as a volunteer for one of your school's programs or events. Many hands make light work, and a fun time is had by all. We need dedicated, enthusiastic people willing to pitch in and help out.

Finally, your attendance at monthly PTA meetings is crucial. These meetings are where we discuss those issues that face us as parents. They are where we make the decisions about the programs the PTA will offer. They are where you will hear the most accurate and valuable information from our educators and administrators so you can make informed decisions about your child's education. They are the most direct pipeline for your views to be heard and fed back to the school administration, the Board of Education and other town bodies. And, they are a place to socialize and meet your fellow parents. We hope to see everybody there.