

## Legislative Report 2007

### Mt. Bethel Elementary School

PTA, by its own definition, is an organization that advocates for children. Its purposes include “*to secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth*”. Its mission is “*to support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community, and before government agencies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children*”. One of its National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement is **School Decision Making and Advocacy**. Mt. Bethel Elementary School’s legislative goal was a simple one: to make each PTA member an informed and active advocate. With No Child Left Behind legislation defining the hoops through which schools must jump in order to be measured whether they are providing a proper education and making Adequate Yearly Progress, and with the Georgia legislature considering bills on vouchers, funding, charter schools and other local control issues, it is imperative that every parent be involved in their child’s education and to be an informed on the issues so that they can advocate effectively on behalf of their child and every child. To do this the Mt. Bethel legislative team worked first to become educated themselves on the hottest issues affecting children and then communicated those issues to its members in the school and community. To support our goal, the team participated in every legislative activity offered by the State, District and Council PTA and invited PTA members to join them to become better informed.

**State Leadership Training Conference (LTC) (July 2006):**

This year at the Leadership Training Conference, the State provided a legislative track for training future advocates. A variety of courses were offered ranging from “I’m a Legislative Chair now what?” to Advanced Advocacy, from an introduction to Capitol Watch to national issues and a State legislative recap. The track provided training for the novice and experienced advocate so anyone attending could learn something new in how to be an effective advocate. Mt. Bethel PTA representatives attended many of the sessions to become better informed and more confident advocates and to learn what the current issues facing children and education are today.

**Eastern Cobb County Council (ECCC) Priority Fair (August 2006):**

To be a successful advocate you need to know how to advocate. At the ECCC Priority Fair, the Council legislative chairperson instructed each local unit chairperson on what it takes to advocate. Information was distributed that included Georgia PTA’s legislative platform and priorities, contact information of local and state legislators, definitions of legislative jargon, and information on “Where We Stand” listing resolutions and details on the most recently passed resolutions. It also included an introduction of Capitol Watch. Every legislative chairperson was added to an email list to be regularly updated on hot or urgent legislative issues. Mt. Bethel PTA representatives signed up to receive the Legislative Links and Action Alerts to also stay informed.

### **Advocacy/Legislative Conference (September 2006):**

To advocate is “to speak or write in support of something or someone; to plead another’s cause”. Mt. Bethel PTA members attended the conference to become better, more effective advocates. At the conference, attendees learned about hot education issues, how to contact their legislators, were introduced to the legislative priorities, and developed an awareness of education funding. From this conference each attendee developed an understanding of what the current issues affecting education were and how to stay informed and advocate to make a difference in the passage of critical legislation.

### **9<sup>th</sup> District “Meet Your Cobb County Elected Leaders” Day (November 2006)**

The 9<sup>th</sup> District hosted a forum where Cobb County Board of Education members and Cobb County State legislators were available to answer questions from constituents. It was important for Mt. Bethel PTA members to attend to ask their representatives where they stood on education issues and equally important to let them know where we stood. Several questions were asked by our team to ascertain where the State legislators stood on education funding and local control issues. Having that face-to-face time made future contact of legislators and school board members easier and more likely.

### **Communication (monthly):**

Having an informed legislative team that knew the issues and how to advocate is only part of the equation. All the Mt. Bethel PTA members needed to be informed and taught how to advocate for the equation to be complete. Every month in the Mt. Bethel newsletter, *The Bugle*, there were articles about a variety of legislative topics ranging

from voter registration and candidate forums to Meet Your Cobb Elected Officials announcements to an introduction to Capitol Watch. Because a middle school in the area didn't have an active legislative chair those articles were often sent to that middle school to go in their newsletter also. Time critical legislative announcements were sent out via the school's email news flash

**PTA Day at the Capitol (February 2007):**

One voice raised on an issue may get the attention of a legislator, but when 300,000 voices are raised in unison they can't be ignored. PTA Day at the Capitol is a day where advocates from all over the state descended on the capitol to become informed about the hot issues, learn how to navigate the Capitol and talk to legislators and then sit down at lunch and actually talk to those legislators who represent them. Mt. Bethel PTA members were there in force to meet the Cobb County legislators and let them know how we felt about the bills and issues currently being discussed by the General Assembly.

**School Council (ongoing):**

The goal of a school council is to provide a forum where parents, teachers and community members come together in equal representation to advise the school in ways to enhance student achievement. The purpose of the council is to "increase the participation of parents and the community in the management and operation of Mt. Bethel Elementary School". It should be noted that every member of the School Council – parents, teachers, principal and community member – is a PTA member. In the National Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy it promotes "parents as full

partners in the decisions that affect children and families”. An informed parent is a better advocate. Participation on the school council by parent representatives provided a means for Mt. Bethel to support the third goal of the National Standard of School Decision Making and Advocacy: Include and give equal representation to parents on decision-making and advisory committees”.

**Results:**

It is hard to quantify the results of advocacy. Some days the email or phone call is successful in changing a legislator’s mind and some days you politely agree to disagree. The results are measured in the number of calls that were made, the turnout at public forums and town hall meetings and, ultimately, in legislation that successfully passed or failed the way PTA wanted it to. To this end, Mt. Bethel’s advocacy efforts were successful in many areas: parents showed up at candidate forums and advocacy events. Members accessed Capitol Watch to get up-to-date information about legislative activities and signed up to get Action Alerts. They made phone calls to legislators about SB 10 and the austerity cuts in the budget. They became informed voters and voted. Mt. Bethel PTA members became informed advocates who worked to make a difference. They supported the National Standard of School Decision Making and Advocacy in many diverse ways.