

## **Our Children - President's Message**

### **October/November 2011**

#### **Reconnect with Health**

As parents, we want the best for our children, and we strive to ensure they have what they need to succeed in school—supplies, calculators, computer time, even tutoring if they need it. But the most important thing children need is their health. Research has shown that when children miss too many days of school, particularly in kindergarten and first grade, they are at greater risk of dropping out of high school. Helping our children to eat right, get enough sleep, and stay physically fit ensures that they will be alert and ready to learn.

To focus attention on this crucial piece of the education puzzle, National PTA designated November Healthy Lifestyles Month and developed a grant program to help PTAs improve and expand their healthy lifestyles activities. This issue of *Our Children* focuses attention on some of these activities and on ways PTAs can make healthy lifestyles a year-round habit in their school communities. At the same time, we can all learn to live better by incorporating healthy habits into our own lives.

It is not easy to balance the demands of everyday life. First Lady Michelle Obama, who has honored us with an article on her *Let's Move!* campaign to end childhood obesity, talks about her own struggle to “do it all”; sometimes, she admits, it was easier to go to the drive-thru for dinner than to make a healthy meal from scratch. We shouldn't feel guilty for taking some short cuts once in a while; however, when we find ourselves taking these short cuts on a regular basis, it is time to take stock and make some changes.

Research has shown that the physical activity and eating behaviors children adopt are shaped by parental health behaviors. It is important for us to be a role model for our children and the students with whom we interact at school and during PTA activities.

We can set children up for success by limiting the sugar-sweetened beverages available in our homes and in the school cafeteria. Let's help our children appreciate the lovely, sweet taste of carrots, apples, and other healthy foods. If you are a parent who asks your children to clean their plates before they can leave the table, try serving smaller food portions. That way, you can get that clean plate without encouraging your children to overeat. Finally, physical activity is a must for maintaining a healthy weight and reducing stress. So, let's turn off the television, put away our computers and cellphones, go out, and get active! Getting and staying healthy is a great way to reconnect with our families and the world around us.

Betsy Landers  
National PTA President