

# ABCs of the PTA

This is not your parents' PTA—it's queer-friendly and ready to welcome you



PTA promoter  
Bonnie Tinker

*Last month I attended the Oregon PTA as the delegate from Lincoln High School in Portland and discovered a people's movement that is alive and well*

My spring cleaning this year includes moving my mental categorization of the Parent Teacher Association from my "school social activities" file to my "exciting grass-roots movement" file.

Throughout our children's school careers, we've been pretty typical PTA moms: We pay our dues in the fall, attend at least one of the annual fund-raising activities, and dutifully buy a magazine subscription, a few candy bars or a bunch of plants during the school-wide sale. But last month I attended the Oregon PTA as the delegate from Lincoln High School in Portland and discovered a people's movement that is alive and well.

Back in 1994, we turned to the PTA for support when the Oregon Citizens Alliance was trying to drive us right out of our children's schools. When I attended the state convention this year, I discovered that the resolution they passed back in 1994 is not only a part of the organization's history, it remains an active part of the Oregon PTA's policies. Right there in the convention notebook, under health and welfare policies and the legislative action program for 2000-2002, it says: "The Oregon PTA supports federal and state legislation toward the following goals....

To oppose all legislative attempts to suppress information about family diversity and sexual orientation."

The 1994 resolution has not only become an active part of the PTA's ongoing policy, this commitment to safety and respect for all students and families was reflected in workshops offered at the convention. A workshop on dangers of teen suicide included information about the increased risks among lesbian, gay, bi and trans youth. The workshop on bullying and sexual harassment intervention and prevention acknowledged that children of lesbian and gay parents are at increased risk for harassment. And when I shared my concern about this issue, heads around the room nodded in support.

Katherine Firestone, president of the Oregon PTA, is clear about the organization's commitment: "The PTA has always dedicated itself to the belief that no child should suffer because a few people believe that the child isn't being raised according to a given individual's standards. Every child deserves respect, love and caring, adequate health care, and the best public education that we can provide. To single any one child out is heresy to the work of our founders 104 years ago and the mission of the

PTA that remains unchanged to this day."

In advocacy workshops presented by National PTA Vice President Vicki Rafel and state Vice President Lisa Thirkill, I learned that the PTA backs this commitment with a comprehensive platform to support safety, welfare and a quality education for all children. At an April 16 meeting, the state board of directors reaffirmed its opposition to all legislation that discriminates against our families in schools—including the proposed ballot measure currently being circulated by the Oregon Citizens Alliance and the Christian Coalition.

The PTA also recognizes that school discrimination and censorship measures pushed by groups such as the OCA are only a part of a comprehensive attack on public education. The Oregon PTA is focusing on some very real threats to the already fragile funding system that is used to run Oregon's public schools. One of the threats comes from Bill Sizemore, whose proposed initiative would allow all federal tax liability to be deducted from income on state returns, drastically cutting revenue.

"While it may sound dramatic," said Thirkill, "the reality is that if this proposal were passed into law, it would essentially mean the end of the public education system in the state of Oregon. There would simply be no money."

The PTA was there for lesbian, gay, bi and trans students, teachers and parents in 1994, and they are with us again this year as we fight for equality for our students in public schools. It's time for the sexual minorities community to return this support for all children and for public schools. I hope you will all join me in taking the following actions:

1. Support local school funding measures while continuing to insist on equitable, full funding for all public schools. In Oregon this means voting for local-option levies. In Portland, join members of the Sexual Minority Parent's Advisory Group at the Support our Local Schools committee office for phone banking on May 11. Call (503) 221-7922 for more information. And remember to vote yes on 26-2 and yes on 26-1!

Although the Oregon PTA is afraid local options are part of the divide-and-conquer strategy being used by legislators who wish to abdicate their responsibility to support all schools adequately, the organization encourages a yes vote as long as you also send a strong message to your state representatives and senators that we need sufficient and stable funding for all schools, especially those in poor districts with low tax bases.

2. Oppose all efforts to undermine the public school funding base. The attack on school funding may be disguised as a tax cut for ordinary citizens. The Sizemore measure in Oregon is sold in just this way. In reality, a family of four with an adjusted gross income of \$40,000 would receive a \$20 tax cut, while at \$60,000 the cut would be \$290 and at \$200,000 it would be \$3,912. If the measure passes, schools would lose \$323.1 million next year, forcing a 30 percent cut in programs.

3. Join the PTA in calling for common-sense gun laws to protect our children. Join the Million Mom March in Washington, D.C., or in Portland on May 14. (In Portland, gather at Southwest 12th Avenue and Salmon Street at 11 a.m.)

4. Most importantly, get involved with your neighborhood schools. Join the PTA!

Firestone says: "Anyone can join a local PTA—we have a lot of units that encourage neighbors, or local businesses, or grandparents to join and support what they do. It's a great way to get the surrounding community involved—they should receive the local school newsletter, be invited to events, and just in general be asked to be involved to whatever degree they choose."

You can also become an "acorn" member through the state office. Part of the National PTA mission is "to encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation."

■ To contact the PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION in Oregon, call (503) 234-3928. For other contact information, check out the National PTA Internet site at [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org), send an e-mail to [info@pta.org](mailto:info@pta.org) or call (312) 670-6782.

BONNIE TINKER is the executive director of Love Makes a Family Inc., an international membership organization providing a public voice for lesbian, gay, bi and trans families. To join, send a contribution to P.O. Box 5163, Portland, OR 97208, or visit [www.teleport.com/~lmfamily](http://www.teleport.com/~lmfamily) and join using your favorite plastic. To join the group's e-mail list, send a message to [lmf@divanw.com](mailto:lmf@divanw.com) with the word subscribe in the subject line. For further information, call (503) 228-3892.

**Dharma Rain Zen Center**  
2539 SE Madison Portland, Oregon 97214  
503-239-4846 Fax: 503-239-5217  
E-mail: [Staff@Dharma-Rain.Org](mailto:Staff@Dharma-Rain.Org)  
[www.Dharma-Rain.Org](http://www.Dharma-Rain.Org)

Dharma Rain Zen Center is a Soto Zen Temple for Lay practice, bringing people together to build community and wisdom through practice. DRZC offers retreats, classes, introductory workshops, and sesshins. The Zendo space is shared with groups in the Vipassana, Tibetan, & Zen traditions, creating a unique atmosphere and opportunities for learning about Buddhism and its daily application.

Kyogen and Gyokuko Carlson, resident teachers.

**GenderQueer:**  
**Northwest Transgender & Intersex Film Festival**

**May 18-21, 2000**  
**The Evergreen State College**  
For More Info:  
(360)866-6000 ext.6544  
[genderqueerfilmfest@hotmail.com](mailto:genderqueerfilmfest@hotmail.com)

**Coventry Cycle Works**

*Professional Service*  
*Comfortable Bikes*  
*Recumbents a Specialty!*

Open Tuesday-Sunday  
230-7723  
2025 SE Hawthorne

**Really Cool Stuff**  
**Antiques & Treasures**

7872 SW Capitol Highway  
Portland, OR 97219 • 503-246-6267  
We are located in Multnomah Village near The Bridge. Call for directions.