

THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF MOTHERS AND PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS

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The National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations was the pioneer organization in studying and promoting every phase of child welfare, and it must ever stand at the very heart of all child welfare movements, because without mothers' coöperation no real betterment can be secured for children. It was the first national movement to widen and deepen the influence of fathers and mothers through the demand for educated parenthood and a wider vision of childhood's needs and parental duty. To help the home to do its best work, a practical plan for reaching every home must be found. The Parent-Teacher Association and the Mothers' Circle were selected as the mediums best adapted to reach all homes. Through the well organized school system a way was open to provide opportunities for home education for parents, and at the same time establish sympathetic, intelligent coöperation with the great body of teachers who were sharing with parents the education and guidance of the children.

Neither parents nor teachers were in touch with each other, and children suffered by lack of this mutual understanding—while the work of the teachers was greatly increased by lack of it. The Congress assumed the task of organizing Parent-Teacher Associations in every school. It also assumed the educational direction of these associations, in order to make them of real value to parents, to ensure their continuance, and to keep them true to their fundamental, far-reaching purpose. There had been parent associations of various kinds, but the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations originated the movement to make them universal, and to widen the scope of the educational system by making the schools serve a double purpose in education, by making it possible for parents to learn through them all that would enable them to be better fathers and mothers. The plan included the

wider use of school buildings, opening them for reading rooms and recreation centres wherever the need existed, and placing the responsibility for all this in the hands of those most concerned—the parents and teachers of the children in the schools.

A NATIONAL UNIVERSITY FOR PARENTS

The Congress, in its comprehensive plan for a nation-wide system of providing educational help for parents, assumed the functions of a National University for Parents with headquarters in Washington, but radiating its educational guidance to all who could be reached.

It was soon found necessary to establish state branches, through which extension work could be done, carrying the message to mothers just where they were. The interest and coöperation of state superintendents of schools were enlisted. Every officer gave her time and financed her work. For information a pamphlet on "How to Organize Parent-Teacher Associations with Suggestions for Programs" is published by the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 910 Loan & Trust Bldg., Washington, D. C. The *Child Welfare Magazine*, Box 4022, West Philadelphia, gives each month a program and publishes reports of work of Parent-Teacher Associations all over the United States.

SCOPE OF PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS

In the organization of Parent-Teacher Associations, the following reasons for their formation are given. Parent-Teacher Associations have three main reasons for existence:

First: To give fathers and mothers the opportunity to better educate themselves for intelligent home-making and child-nurture.

Second: To enable parents to learn what the schools are doing in order that the home may offer effective coöperation and that the schools may also coöperate with the home.

Third: To study community conditions affecting the welfare of the young with the purpose of arousing a sentiment of community responsibility.

The Parent-Teacher Association, needing for its full success the membership of parents and teachers of all political parties, all religious beliefs and of many different opinions as to the right and wrong of various movements, cannot afford to risk antagonisms needlessly. There are other well established agencies available

for discussion and action along these lines. Let the Parent-Teacher Association confine itself to its own single high purpose, that of bettering conditions for "citizens in the making."

The world has no greater need than that of a wiser, better trained parenthood; this need is not yet recognized in school and college courses; the Parent-Teacher Association, therefore, serves as almost the only study class open to parents who wish to learn more of the duties of their calling. It raises the standard of home life through the education of parents; and through organization gives power for united and effective service.

COÖPERATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

The Parent-Teacher Association has long passed its experimental stage; from leaders in education everywhere letters come asking the help of the Congress in organizing and providing educational programs. State superintendents of public instruction in the states of Delaware and Washington have made it a part of their work to request all principals to organize parent-teacher associations as members of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations. Valuable pamphlets on this subject have been published by these superintendents. Hundreds of other state and county superintendents have given invaluable coöperation. Mrs. Ella Flagg Young, of Chicago, in a letter dated January, 1916, says:

Since the organization of the Congress of Mothers and of the Parent-Teacher Associations, I have known the leaders in Chicago and many of the workers in Illinois outside of Chicago. These auxiliary associations have endeavored to work in the spirit of the National Association. They have been invaluable in bringing the parents into close relations with the schools. They have had a marked influence on the administration of the schools. The barrier which had been quite generally erected between parents and teachers has been removed. They have helped revive the feeling that the public schools are the people's schools; are to be strengthened by the people.

MOTHERS STUDY CONDITIONS OF CHILDREN

Ever since 1897 conditions of childhood outside the home have been a subject of exhaustive study by the Congress. When it began its work, children were in prisons and jails in every state, associated with confirmed criminals in all court procedure and before and after trial. No state except Michigan had assumed the responsibility of providing adequately for its dependent or orphan children,

No state had, from the mother's viewpoint, provided for the all around protection of the welfare of the children.

The first juvenile court and probation system was established in Chicago in 1899, the bill for it being drafted by Hon. Harvey B. Hurd. The Congress appreciated fully the advantages offered by this new system and worked unceasingly to promote its establishment in every state and in other lands, by conducting a systematic propaganda which was successful in many states.

Detention houses instead of jails were promoted. Recognizing that successful probation work is an educational function, and can only be successful when done with sympathetic insight into child life, the Congress has never ceased its efforts to place probation work under educational direction. Judge Lindsey¹ says: "There is no one factor or influence among the many good influences working for human betterment in this country that has done more to advance Juvenile Court and Probation work than the Mothers' Congress."

PROTECTION AGAINST CHILD LABOR

The Congress in 1902 inaugurated its child labor committee, and used its efforts to prevent the employment of little children in mines and factories, and to insure better factory inspection, and has ever since given its influence to promoting protection of children in industry. It has opposed all employment of children in occupations injurious to life, health or character, and the committee has given exhaustive study to the entire subject of work for children, earnestly working against abuses. An investigation is being made by the committee on the effects of child labor laws on child-life in different states, with a view to present and future welfare of children. Superintendents of schools and parents have called the attention of the committee to the necessity for such investigation.

MOTHERS' PENSIONS

In a study of children coming into juvenile courts, children who were truants and little children who were working, the children in orphanages and institutions, the Congress saw the necessity of

¹ Pamphlets on "Next Steps Forward in Juvenile Court and Probation Work" —Report of Ben B. Lindsey and Mrs. Frederic Schoff, Chairman and Vice-Chairman Juvenile Court and Probation Dept. National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association. "Small Town and Rural Probation Work, Applicable to any County." Send to 910 Loan & Trust Bldg., Washington, D. C.

keeping the mother with her children, and in 1911 inaugurated a nation-wide movement to secure mothers' pensions to prevent the breaking up of the home when through poverty or death of the father, the mother is unable to keep it.

There is an aspect to this question which has wielded its influence in the evolution of a plan that would enable the mother to keep a home for her children. The struggle for existence has driven many children of tender years into the ranks of wage-earners before they were physically able to do the tasks required of them. Deprived thereby of any chance for the fundamental education which would enable them to fill places where there would be opportunity for advancement, these children have become a source of anxiety to all who are interested in the future of society. Some plan must be devised that would make it possible for the home to be sustained without the work of little children. Thus the nation-wide movement to secure mothers' pensions has a meaning and purpose the scope of which is not fully realized even by some of its warmest advocates.

A working mother with the best qualifications for being a good mother to her children, cannot exercise her powers when she is absent most of the daylight hours and must work far into the night to keep the roof over their heads. The state has decided that her service to the children is more important than her service as a wage-earner. It is safe to predict that truancy will decrease 50 per cent when the mother's pension becomes operative. Thirty-five states have adopted this preserver of the home, and a mother's care for the children, and in every state the Congress has been an active factor in securing this legislation, and in placing its administration outside of charity. Pennsylvania and New York methods are recommended.²

SAVING THE BABIES

By careful tests the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations has proved that 70 per cent of babies who die before they are a year old, can be saved by education of mothers

² "The Evolution of the Mother's Pension—Its Scope and Object." The pamphlet used successfully in legislative campaigns in a number of states can be supplied by application to National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 910 Loan & Trust Bldg., Washington, D. C.

in infant hygiene. All the knowledge possessed by physicians and health boards counts for nothing unless the mothers, who have the actual care of the babies, can themselves possess the knowledge of the proper care and feeding of babies.

The National Congress of Mothers has for years conducted a constant campaign to awaken mothers and make them realize that more than instinct is required to have healthy babies, and to give them a chance to live. It has a method of learning of mothers of babies, and sends a bulletin on The Care of the Baby. It has sent appeals to all state and local Boards of Health to establish and maintain Departments of Child Hygiene, to see that every new mother is informed of all that will help her to give proper care to her baby and furnish protection to the milk supply; to have a Parents' Educational Bureau as a part of the equipment of every Board of Health, and to see that every mother is given the opportunity to visit it. In Portland, Oregon, the city coöperates with the local branch of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations in maintenance of a most successful Parents' Educational Bureau. Through the Child Hygiene Department, National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, vast amount of work for baby-saving has been done in many states.

STATE CHILD WELFARE COMMISSIONS

The Congress urged the appointment of an unsalaried state child welfare commission in every state to study every phase of child welfare, to consider existing conditions and to recommend needed improvements. Oregon has complied with the request. Its commission, appointed by Governor West, has done fine work—Chairman, Mrs. Robert H. Tate, 1811 E. Morrison St., Portland, Oregon. Every state requires the work of a child welfare commission, made up of broad-minded, unsalaried citizens, with the governor as *ex officio* member and with reports to the legislature that the members may have in mind the development of a system of state protection for the physical, mental and moral development of all its children. The Congress has done, and is doing, valuable work in many states in the extension of kindergartens as part of the school system in coöperation with the Kindergarten Division, United States Bureau of Education and National Kindergarten Association.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COÖPERATION

Federal coöperation has been given the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations from the beginning, for the relation of its work to the youth of the nation was fully appreciated. Three international child welfare conferences have been held in Washington, the invitations for all nations to participate being sent by the Department of State. At the first of these the President of the United States delivered the main address. Federal coöperation with several divisions of the Department of Agriculture has been mutually advantageous during many years.

HOME EDUCATION DIVISION ESTABLISHED

The National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations most earnestly desired that the United States Bureau of Education should recognize that parents are educators, and in as great need of suggestion as teachers in schools, or as farmers in agriculture. When recognition was given by the Commissioner of Education to the fact that the larger part of children's education is conducted by parents—and that possibilities for preparation and study must be provided for them, an important step for child welfare was taken, and an unlimited field of service to parents was opened. The Home Education Division of the Bureau of Education was established in September, 1913, in coöperation with the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations. The official announcement is here given:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Education
Washington

The Home Education Division, which has just been established, will do whatever it can to help parents:

1. To further their own education by recommending to them interesting and valuable reading matter.

2. In regard to the care and home education of their children, with reference to: (a) physical care and health, sleep, food, etc.; (b) games and plays; (c) their early mental development; (d) the formation of moral habits.

We hope to interest the boys and girls who have left school and are still at home, and by directing their home reading and study we may be able to further their education.

It is our intention to issue bulletins and literature, practical in their character, which will be available to every home. The National Congress of Mothers and

Parent-Teacher Associations has agreed to assist the Bureau of Education in this work and can supply much literature not available through this office.

If the parents of your school district could be brought together at the school house or any other good place, perhaps once a month, to discuss their common problems, it would be mutually helpful. Will you let us know if you are willing to take up this matter in your school district and make a beginning by inviting some of the parents who are interested in such matters, and by enlisting, if possible, the coöperation of the teacher or teachers. The Bureau will send a brief form for simple organization of a Parents' Association, if you desire it. We expect to have a great deal of valuable matter for use of parents and teachers and for older boys and girls.

Rightly used, the home is the most important factor in the education of children. Through its Home Education Division, the Bureau of Education is trying to help the home to do its best work. Your coöperation will be invaluable. Kindly let me know if we may expect it.

Yours sincerely,

P. P. CLAXTON,
Commissioner.

WORK OF THE HOME EDUCATION DIVISION

The extension of Parent-Teacher Associations, the coöperation of 40,000 women recommended by superintendents of schools, the distribution of educational bulletins to mothers, the preparation of reading courses for parents, for boys and girls who have left school, for men and women wishing to pursue home study, the provision of certificates for all who complete the courses, the replies to many questions from individual mothers, have brought much appreciation and have given a keen perception of the great need for the work of home education. Thirteen million children under school age in the United States are under the exclusive care of parents. Education in physical care means life to thousands. Education in the development of moral habits will prevent the blighting of many lives at their beginning. The greatest educational work is done in the first six years, and no after care can make up for neglect then. Eighteen million children of school age spend one tenth of their time in school, while nine tenths of their time is under parental direction and guidance, showing the relative educational responsibility of parents and teachers.

Twenty million boys and girls who have left school need encouragement in the continuance of education during the most critical years of youth, when insight and sympathy can lead upward, but when lack of it has driven many away from home influence.

The federal government now considers the education of children from infancy instead of from the age of six, and it considers their education for twenty-four hours a day, instead of five hours, and for twelve months of the year instead of ten months, as heretofore.

During 1915, 95,000 reading courses were sent out by request, and over 25,000 letters were sent. Thousands of bulletins on *The Care of the Baby* have been sent to mothers, while two editions of *1,000 Good Books for Children* have been published. This was prepared by the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations.

Two joint tours of representatives of the Bureau of Education, and officers of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, and National Kindergarten Association, have been arranged during 1915-16, covering the western and southern states in the promotion of home education.

FOREIGN INTEREST

Extension of national organizations similar to the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations is assured. The Chinese government requested the Congress to send its president to China to aid the government in forming a National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations. Japan through private sources has also asked this help. The Marchioness of Aberdeen has accepted the duty of organizer for Great Britain. Cuba has already organized. Argentina has taken steps toward national organization.

The ideals of a nation are created and inspired by the homes. To help all homes to give true high ideals of life, of citizenship and of duty to God and man is to lay sure and strong the foundations for a great nation. The work of the Congress is civic work in its highest sense, and it welcomes the coöperation and membership of all who would give a happy childhood to every child.