

## **Maranan Challenges Delegates to Actively Participate in a Movement for Children Living in Poverty**

Paola Maranan, a long time child advocate and the executive director of the Children's Alliance, challenged PTA delegates at the Convention Awards Banquet on May 3rd, 2008, to use not only the power of thousands, but also the power of one, to overcome the greatest challenge that kids and families face today—poverty.

"In a nation of nearly 300 million people, the number living below the poverty level is nearly 37 million. Our poverty rate is the highest in the developed world and is equivalent to the entire population of the country of Canada or Morocco," she said as she outlined the scope of this problem facing for our nation.

The hardest hit members of our population are children. "We tell our kids that they can be anything they dream of being, yet we leave millions of them to suffer the minimizing effect of poverty and neglect," Maranan said. She explained that poverty represents the greatest threat to our children--affecting their safety, education, health, hunger, and homelessness. She pointed out a little known fact that that the strongest predictor of student performance on the WASL is family income status. "When it comes to education, poverty matters; and when it comes to poverty, education matters," she explained.

As advocates for children, Maranan urged us to work together for the whole child. Kids need good early learning experiences in order to be ready to learn and achieve success when they enter school. Children whose families are at a higher income level have access to early learning programs that help them succeed. All children need this kind of exposure to high quality early learning. "Child advocates need to speak to what the education system needs to do in order to help, and education advocates must speak to the solutions to alleviate poverty long before students enter the schoolhouse door," she said.

Maranan pointed out that one in seven children in our state live in a family whose income is below the poverty level and 64 percent of those children live in families that have at least one parent who works. "Unfortunately, the great American promise that if you work hard and play by the rules, you can provide for your family is no longer true," she said. "In total there are 207,000 children who live in poverty in our state—that's more than combined population of Auburn, Centralia, Ellensburg, Moses Lake, Marysville, Port Angeles, Pullman and Wenatchee."

In addition, children of color are disproportionately poor. "Only one out of ten children in our state are Latino, yet account for one in five of the children living in poverty in our state," she said. As advocates for children, Maranan encouraged delegates that these are the things we should be talking about. She encouraged delegates to go beyond simply discussing the problem, but take action by participating in a movement for these children and families.

"As advocates it's our job to speak up, to call up for the right priorities, to redirect conversation, to question whether the policies we adopt and the investments we make are right for our children and our families," Maranan said.

She suggested that when there are injustices in our country, the American people have responded by rising up to respond to those inequities. Some examples of this are the women's suffrage movement, the movement for people living with disabilities, and the civil rights movement. "Movements have forced us to create better match between our values and our reality. These movements are an extension of a spirit left by the American revolution," Maranan explained.

She encouraged delegates to participate in a movement to help all children reach their full potential. "We look forward to the day when the movement for children is so strong and so undeniable, that no decision will be made, no legislative session will pass, without policy makers asking: 'Is this good for kids?' That could be our legacy," Maranan challenged.

She left delegates with three things our organization needs to do in starting this movement:

1. Tackle the issue of poverty—both by working at root causes, and mitigating its effects
2. Continue to bring attention the fact that children are suffering the effects of poverty, especially the children of color.

3. Address the state's structural budget problem. "We need a system of revenue that is fair, stable and capable of meeting the needs of our kids," Maranan said.

In addition, she suggested three actions that individuals can take:

1. Look for candidate who stands up for kids. Ask them tough questions regarding children.
2. Commit to helping policy makers understand what is the problem. Give them the information they need to make good decisions.
3. Have the courage to hold policy makers accountable for their decisions.

"All actions matter, and the most important action is the one you do take," Maranan concluded.