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[Home](#) > Mom, Apple Pie, and...Climate Change?



[1]

SHARE TWEET EMAIL [PRINT](#) [2]

[Climate change education](#) [3]

[Minda Berbeco](#) [1]

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[Mom, Apple Pie, and...Climate Change?](#) [4]



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When you see the letters “PTA,” what do you think of? Bake sales? School dances? Arguments over whether to sell soda in the lunchroom?

What about hot lunches for schoolchildren, early child development initiatives, and education as a fundamental human right?

It turns out that the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) helped to launch all of those important reforms, and more. An early champion of children’s rights, the PTA originally started over 100 years ago to rally the public against child labor. Since that time the organization has taken on drug addiction, sexually transmitted diseases, and even scoliosis (I had my mandatory scoliosis test in elementary school; did you?).

In fact, if you went to public school anywhere in America in the last 100 years, you have almost certainly

benefited from some initiative that the PTA started or supported.

What is really neat about the PTA is that all of those initiatives started in one school somewhere in America—in a community where the parents and teachers in their local PTA got together and said, “Gosh, that just doesn’t seem right.” They rallied support in their community, brought their ideas to the state and national levels of the PTA, and then worked with schools across the country to ensure that their initiatives were moved forward.

California’s PTA (CAPTA) in particular, as the largest state PTA, has had a hand in launching some of the most ambitious programs. Having already tackled some of the most contentious issues related to youth, such as smoking, air pollution, and even school violence, CAPTA is considering taking on a new issue that is affecting children across the country: climate change. This weekend—May 2 and 3, 2015— CAPTA will vote on a proposed resolution about teaching climate change. The resolution calls on schools to teach the evidence for global change and potential solutions, and urges parents to support their children’s teachers in doing so.

Why have a PTA resolution on climate change? [A report](#) [6] last year from the federal Department of Defense, the Department of Health and Human Services, and eleven other governmental agencies observed that climate change will disproportionately affect children. They are the most vulnerable among us, and so require special attention when considering climate impacts. But they also are an ideal group to start learning about resilience, adaptation, and mitigation. They are the ones who can—and must—learn about engineering solutions and energy initiatives. We can prepare them for the future through arming them with knowledge.

I’m heading out to Sacramento this weekend to encourage CAPTA to launch its new initiative on climate change. It’s an exciting opportunity to have parents rally around the schools to support climate education and empower their students. If this resolution passes, maybe twenty years from now teaching climate change won’t be as controversial as it is today. Rather, it will be considered as routine as early education, seatbelts and bicycle helmets—yes, all projects supported by the PTA as well! With initiatives like this coming from the parents in support of the teachers, teaching climate change may one day become as wholesome as Mom and apple pie.

[+ read](#) [4]

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Links

[1] <https://ncse.com/users/minda-berbeco>

[2] <https://ncse.com/printpdf/16325>

[3] <https://ncse.com/blog-tags/climate-change-education>

[4] <https://ncse.com/blog/2015/04/mom-apple-pie-climate-change-0016325>

[5] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bcveen/2053950521/in/photolist-48v2W2-5o3oVq-359JS-8wEiQb-cgfwWG-9KVNUT-dpRVYP-71MWb-8ukacG-7ExjbX-3Zb3rf-h3dghH-p6Fw5d-i4KtxP-mLBDgT-9Xn2hK-645dsL-rosGX-i4JVkW-7G9kwn-oGuzA-aDnik-s4sUf-dGgNkH-awQibh-pDbK9D-dpRTwT-sEVfw-bD94ek-cLV2o-h3ckAf-g3Z3Lu-8RHQ8b-5zj7GP-6f9Upo-2g42r-71ygny-4dsaxS-qEMkj5-dgLJDj-dgLUHt-8REGGk-8RHPJG-8moZDf-nG5zrG-5zB8Hx-4JzYpw-nhrADo-7Z4gJr-6Z3gLK>

[6] <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/report/sectors/human-health>