Renee DeBiase (Leadership Experience)

1. Describe work you have done with your local, council or state PTA leadership or other state/national organizations that would support the mission, values and purposes of PTA.

I have been a local unit and council officer for many years. I am currently serving my second term as HCCPTA council president. Currently I am an active officer on many local PTA boards. Through these experiences, I am aware of the concerns and issues that local leaders face especially if they don’t have access to mentors. Within the council, I have coordinated our annual Founders’ Day Celebration. I have mediated discussions between PTAs and school leadership. I have also mediated disputes among local PTA Boards of Directors. I think it is important for these leaders, who have chosen to volunteer their time, know that they are not alone.

1. Describe how you will ensure the Free State PTA Board of Directors remain transparent and accountable to the membership.

In my opinion, limiting and/or restricting the distribution of information, holding executive sessions during board meetings, passing blame without accepting responsibility for personal contributions of failures are all examples of what I have observed as instances which limit transparency and accountability within an organization. PTA is not a full-time job, and our personal priorities (to include: job workload) should be taken into consideration as the state PTA releases information. The more clear, factual and succinct the message, the more palatable it’ll be to the membership. I know that PTA leaders are passionate about what they do. However, I think sometimes our feelings can take our focus off the mission of the PTA: our children!

1. PTA has prioritized outreach to the following under-represented constituent groups: families in crisis, English language learners, families in poverty, men, Gen Z/millennial/Gen X-ers generations, immigrants, LTBTQ+, rural/urban families, working parents, and other caregivers/advocates. Have you had personal experience with one or more of these groups, and/or experience in engaging with one or more of these groups? If so, share how this has prepared you to serve these priority populations. If not, how will you prepare to serve these priority populations in the state of Maryland?

I have served/am currently serving on several Harford County Public Schools committees. I serve on a variety of PTA boards. I am an advocate for education and I believe, when properly utilized, education can take you anywhere you want to go. Rhetoric invokes feelings. Feelings do not usually provide insight to a complete truth. But discussing feelings and beliefs can offer some insight into what our neighbor is thinking. Being involved in a variety of local PTAs, serving on a council and engaging with the school system, gives me a unique opportunity to talk with all types of people and listen/share different perspectives on a variety of concerns/beliefs.

1. What is the key to empowering future leaders and cultivating talent? Can you tell us about a time where you demonstrated this quality?

I think it is important to change the general perceptions that: PTA leaders are all “stay-at-home moms,” or “PTAs are cliques,” or “I’m too busy to volunteer,” or [fill in the blank]. I think that in seeking talent, we need to share that these perceptions are not true. Trying something shouldn’t cement our role in the PTA hierarchy – or in the community – as one of the few who are willing to be available. This notion appears, however, to be a default perception. I think we also need to tell people: leadership isn’t scary… most of the time. And when it does get scary, the locals need someone who is able to listen and provide constructive feedback/guidance/support on how to work through those difficult times.

1. What do you believe is the most critical piece for a nonprofit board in planning for organizational success? Please share an example of when you engaged in such planning.

Understanding the reasons for why we serve and disregarding judgment when one person’s reason differs from our own. I began serving, because I wanted to be involved. Initially, I wanted to show my kids that their education matters to me. Now, I want my kids to see that not only their education, but the education of their peers (and those who have gone before and will come after) also matters to me. I think the fact that the PTA is non-profit reemphasizes that this work is so invaluable to me that I show up without being paid.

1. When you consider committee work that you regard as having been very successful, tell us what you did in planning and execution that made it possible to accomplish the work.

Every year, HCCPTA holds our annual Founders’ Day celebration. I have led the HCCPTA Awards Committee activities since 2018. I think it is important to recognize people for the service and contributions they share with the community. This past year, I nominated several people for the awards we offer at a council level. I have also - in previous years - nominated people who were recognized at the state convention.

For our council FD program, I also try to find new and innovative ways to make sure more people are recognized for what they do. It is important to vocalize that – as a PTA – we recognize our leaders have many responsibilities at home, at work, etc. and they have CHOSEN to be here. This message is shared with our guests (to include representation from the school system, the county council and county executive offices).