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### Local News

## New County PTA Council Head Gets To Work

Rochelle C. Eisenberg  
*Staff Reporter*

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Although her kids have long since graduated from the Baltimore County public school system, Sue Katz is still working hard for the parents-teachers association.

This year, Ms. Katz, an Owings Mills resident and Adat Chaim congregant, was named president of the PTA Council of Baltimore County, an all-volunteer organization that serves as the umbrella organization for individual PTAs in each county school. Currently, there are 159 PTAs in Baltimore County, serving approximately 45,000 members.

A strong believer in the importance of PTAs, Ms. Katz said, "The schools with the strongest PTAs have the best reputations." She said her goal is to promote the importance of parental involvement and increase membership.

Understanding that the PTA is relevant throughout a student's academic life, Ms. Katz said she hopes to address issues that are important to the area. For example, she noted that a parent recently contacted her about after-prom parties, and she said she hopes to investigate developing possible county policy on this issue.



Sue Katz: "The purpose of the PTA is to advocate for the kids and provide leadership training for parents so they can advocate for the kids."  
(Photo Rebecca Gardner)

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"The purpose of the PTA is to advocate for the kids and provide leadership training for parents so they can advocate for kids," she said.

As part of that mission, the PTA Council sponsors a fall workshop featuring exhibits by advocacy groups. This year's workshop will be held Oct. 26 at New Town High in Owings Mills and will include a talk by Michael Gimbel, director of substance abuse at Sheppard Pratt Health Systems.

During her two-year term, Ms. Katz said she also hopes to increase communication between the PTA Council and parents. For the first time, the organization plans to offer the PTA Council bulletin for online subscribers.

A second goal of Ms. Katz's is to enhance partnerships with the entire community. Because one of the PTA's roles is to advocate at pre-operating budget hearings, she has scheduled meetings with key constituents, from the Board of Education to elected county officials.

In addition to her responsibilities as PTA Council president, Ms. Katz works part-time at the Kennedy Krieger Institute as director of planning and regulatory affairs.

Her first experience working with a PTA was back when her two sons — now ages 21 and 24 — were at preschool and kindergarten at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore. At that time, as a way to learn more about what was going on at her sons' schools, she formed the first parent volunteer group and served as its first chairwoman.

While her sons were attending Owings Mills High, Ms. Katz served as PTA president for two years. At that time, Ms. Katz said she realized how much impact the PTA could have on a school. "One person can make a difference. Collectively, we carry a whole lot more weight," she said.

During her first year as president, Ms. Katz said a parent came to her concerned that when her child returned to school from sporting events, he had to wait outside, often in the dark, for a parent to pick him up. This parent was hoping to amend county policy against using cell phones, suggesting that students be able to use cell phones in certain circumstances.

Ms. Katz, with the help of Michael J. Finifter, who was an 11th District delegate at the time, and the PTA Council, went to the state legislature to advocate for a bill. She said it was too late in the session, so the bill did not pass. It was around that time, however, that the tragic student killings at

Columbine High School occurred, followed by the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The following year, the bill passed.

As for her overall goals the next two years, Ms. Katz said, "I want the name of PTA out there more and I want it to be a positive name. I want people to recognize the PTA as a true valued partner in the educational process."

To register for the e-bulletin, log onto the PTA Council Web site at **www.bcptacouncil.org** and subscribe to the mailing list.

## County Council Eyes Non-Resident Students

The Baltimore County law office recently ruled that a resolution passed unanimously last March by the Baltimore County Council, requesting an audit of Baltimore County public schools, could move forward.

The resolution, sponsored by City Councilman Vincent Gardina (D-5th), called for an audit to determine whether students from outside the county are illegally attending the county's schools.

The county law office made the decision after the Baltimore County Board of Education was asked to turn over its records and refused, citing that the information was privileged under federal privacy acts.

The ruling stated that the county auditor could have access to the requested information. According to county auditor Brian Rowe, that opinion is in the process of being sent to the Board of Education.

"It is up to the two sides to come to an agreement. If they can't come to an agreement, we might have to ask the opinion from Maryland's attorney general," he said. He added that it is "the directive of the County Council to pursue the issue."

According to Baltimore County Councilman Kevin Kamenetz (D-2nd), the resolution was passed based on "the suspicion on the part of some of the council members that there are unauthorized students in the county schools."

He added that students who do not reside in the county can attend Baltimore County schools if they have authorization. Students are authorized to attend out-of-district based on child care or work-related issues, or they may be paying tuition.

The issue was brought to the council's attention through community complaints that students who did not reside in Baltimore County were attending county schools. Mr. Kamenetz said the schools most likely impacted would be those closest to the city line or county borders.

County Councilman T. Bryan McIntire (D-3rd) said this is a federal and state issue, not a local issue. "It all gets back to the founding concept of the founding fathers that people who control the purse strings not influence those who educate," he said. Baltimore County is one of the funders of local education.

Mr. Rowe said if an agreement is reached, he believes his office will select a few schools to audit. If problems are found, recommendations will be made to the Baltimore School Board on how to address this issue.

Mr. McIntire, however, said he believes that this issue will not be resolved until at least the next five years. "It will be a long trip," he said, "a long journey."

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