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National PTA School of Excellence
Tell Me More

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1. LEARN ABOUT THE NATIONAL PTA SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

National PTA thanks you for expressing interest in our School of Excellence program!

School of Excellence is a recognition program that supports and celebrates partnerships between PTA and schools to enrich the educational experience and overall well-being for all students.

Maybe you are looking to step up your PTA's involvement in school improvements. Maybe something meaningful is already happening between your PTA and school, and you would like to see that recognized. In either case, National PTA's School of Excellence program offers turn-key tools to help you to make a substantial, positive impact on school and student success, and to earn recognition for your PTA and school.

By participating in this program, you will **gain a better understanding of what you can do to support improvements at your school**, and your PTA will gain a seat at the table when important decisions are made.

In the final step of the program, we will determine whether your efforts have paid off, resulting in a stronger family-school partnership. If so, your PTA and school will receive the National PTA School of Excellence distinction and all of the recognition that comes with an honor of this caliber.

What is a National PTA School of Excellence?

At a National PTA School of Excellence, families feel welcomed and empowered to support student success, and PTA is a key partner for continuous school improvement.

As a **National PTA School of Excellence**, your school and PTA will be known as leading the nation in **family-school partnerships** and at the forefront of engaging families in continuous school improvement.

Ready to get started?

Enroll today at pta.org/excellence. Then follow the steps we outline for you, use the tools we provide, and enjoy the pride and recognition that come with the designation of National PTA School of Excellence!

PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

Nurturing family-school partnerships is the core of the National PTA School of Excellence program. Research shows that family engagement supports student success. Regardless of income or background, when families are consistently involved in their children's education, students are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades
- Attend school regularly
- Enroll in higher level classes
- Develop stronger social skills
- Graduate from high school and go on to postsecondary education
- Secure productive work and rewarding careers

**Family Engagement =
Student Success**

Because family engagement is so important, National PTA has worked with leading researchers to identify the three components of effective family engagement:

- 1. A shared responsibility.** Schools, community organizations and families all play a role in student success.
- 2. Cradle to career.** Family engagement is an enduring commitment throughout a child's life, from Early Head Start programs through high school and even college and career.
- 3. Integrated across contexts.** To be effective, family engagement is carried out everywhere that children learn, including home, school, after-school programs and faith-based organizations.

PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships were developed with national experts and reflect the research about how parents, schools and communities can work together to support student achievement. They include the following:

- Standard 1: Welcoming All Families Into the School Community.** Families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued and connected to each other, to school staff and to what students are learning and doing in class.
- Standard 2: Communicating Effectively.** Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.
- Standard 3: Supporting Student Success.** Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and they have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

- Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child.** Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
- Standard 5: Sharing Power.** Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence and create policies, practices and programs.
- Standard 6: Collaborating With Community.** Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services and civic participation.

For more information about PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, visit the National PTA website: PTA.org/familyengagement.

Goals and Objectives

National PTA's goal for the School of Excellence program is **to enrich the educational experience and overall well-being of students**. We will achieve that goal by forming family-school partnerships that leverage community resources to strengthen family engagement in supporting student and school success.

By participating in this program and applying the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships to a specific problem identified by your school community, your PTA will realize the following benefits:

- Help make your school a **more welcoming place for families**.
- Empower families to **be part of school decision-making**.
- Demonstrate to school leaders that **PTA is a key partner** for continuous school improvements.
- Receive **recognition in your community, at the state level and nationwide** for engaging families in a way that makes a substantial, positive impact on your school and student success.

Program Timeline

Step #1: Enroll Your PTA

Complete the enrollment process by October at PTA.org/excellence. Then follow the timeline below to complete this process and become a nationally recognized PTA School of Excellence.



Step #2: Survey your school community

Survey all members of your school community to include your families, school administrator(s), and PTA leaders to gather feedback using the School of Excellence survey tool. You will use the survey results to guide your responses on the Family-School Partnership Scan.

Step #3: Submit Family-School Partnership Scan by November

A Family-School Partnership Scan involves the collection of information from **school leaders, families, and PTA leaders**. Their feedback will help you measure current family engagement strategies and establish a shared goal and objective, which will become a focus for your PTA's efforts for the year.

This focus should be in one of three areas:

- Improving **family engagement in education**
- Ensuring students' **health and safety**
- Supporting **arts in education**

The first component of the Family-School Partnership Scan is feedback from school administrators. You will visit our Web portal for School of Excellence participants and download a School of Excellence flyer and sample agenda for the meeting with your school administrators. At the meeting, share the School

**ACCESS
TURN-KEY TOOLS FOR
ENROLLEES ONLINE**

- A.** PTA School of Excellence Flyer
- B.** Agenda for School Administrator Meeting
- C.** School Leader Questionnaire
- D.** Family Survey
- E.** Sample Family-School Partnership Scan
- F.** Sample Action Plan
- G.** Frequently Asked Questions



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Sample Getting Started Guide

Leaders Questionnaire we provide and ask to collaborate in administering a Family Survey (available on Web portal). You and the school administrator also will discuss setting a shared goal and objective that PTA can support by engaging families throughout the year.

Once you have the results from all members of your school community, as well as determined a shared goal, you must submit the School of Excellence Family-School Partnership Scan on our Web portal for School of Excellence participants.

Step #4: Take Action Using Your Customized *Roadmap to Excellence*

Once you submit your Family-School Partnership Scan, you will receive a customized ***Roadmap to Excellence***, which contains specific recommendations that respond directly to the results you shared and the goal you identified. If you submitted the scan online, you can expect your *Roadmap to Excellence* to arrive in your email inbox within minutes. Be sure to check your spam folder if you don't see it!

Your *Roadmap to Excellence* will include an array of tools and resources to help you implement your action plan. In other words: **Your *Roadmap to Excellence* will tell you exactly what you need to do to become a National PTA School of Excellence.**

Once you have your *Roadmap to Excellence*, your PTA will determine which of the customized recommendations will have the greatest impact on increasing family engagement and achieving results toward your goal. Then you will develop and implement an action plan. Visit the Web portal for a sample action plan.

Step #5: Complete the National PTA School of Excellence Application by June

At the end of the school year, you will conduct a second Family-School Partnership Scan to evaluate your progress. Once again, you will gather feedback from your school administrator(s) and families, repeating the Family Survey.

Then, you will visit on our Web portal for School of Excellence participants to complete the National PTA School of Excellence Application online. This application mirrors the original Family-School Partnership Scan, with the addition of a brief narrative question, which asks you to describe how you have strengthened your family-school partnership and achieved progress toward your desired goal. **Only applications submitted by the due date will be considered for this cycle of award recipients.**

Then, a team of National PTA volunteers will review applications and narratives. A National School of Excellence designation will be given to those **PTAs and schools that meet a specific threshold or make significant improvements in strengthening their family-school partnership**. The review process will take into account the fact that PTAs and schools are starting at different levels of existing family engagement and have varying resources. This approach helps to even the playing field and ensure that **all PTAs** have the opportunity to participate and achieve excellence.

Step #6: Celebrate Your Excellence

In August, you will be notified whether you have been selected to be a National PTA School of Excellence. Upon notification, you will receive a **Celebrate Excellence Guide** to help you plan your school and community celebrations. You also will receive a **banner** to hang prominently at your school. This banner will announce to families: You are welcome here and important to our students' success!

Other celebration tools arriving in the mail with your banner will include:

- Media outreach tools and templates
- Graphics for school and PTA stationery
- Event-planning suggestions and tools

National PTA's School of Excellence recipients throughout the country will be recognized by State and National PTAs in a number of ways, including promotion in national media outlets, on the National PTA website, in our annual report and at National and State PTA Conventions.

PHOEBE APPERSON HEARST AWARD

Each National PTA School of Excellence will automatically qualify to be considered for a Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award, which is National PTA's highest honor and includes a \$2,000 grant.

Your school will carry this designation for two years (e.g., 2017–2019). We will prompt you to begin working toward renewing the designation. National PTA's School of Excellence recipients are encouraged to renew every two years, to continuously strengthen family-school partnerships and address a variety of school and community needs. In addition, working toward the School of Excellence designation will help attract new, action-oriented PTA members who want to focus on the issues that affect our children the most. Consider this program a very powerful membership development tool!

Schools that do not qualify for the National PTA School of Excellence designation will receive a National PTA Certificate of Merit and a new *Roadmap to Excellence: Are We There Yet?* to help them continue to pursue excellence during the following school year. They will build on the momentum they started, and National PTA will provide even more support to help them overcome barriers along the way.

2. BUILD YOUR PTA SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE TEAM

Now that you know the flow of the program, let's back up and talk about the first steps for getting started. The path to excellence begins with a joint commitment by PTA and school leaders to welcome all families, communicate effectively, support student success, speak up for every child, share power and collaborate in the community.

Your PTA School of Excellence team should include:

- PTA members who want to contribute to long-term school improvements
- A school administrator
- Teachers and support staff
- Student leaders (depending on age)
- Community members

This group will work together to conduct the family-school partnership scan, set shared goals for school improvement and oversee the implementation of recommendations in your school's customized *Roadmap to Excellence*.

Recruit Volunteers

Start by identifying and inviting representatives of any existing leadership team involved in continuous school improvement. These groups are known by various names. Yours might be called a *school advisory council*, *parent advisory council*, *school improvement team*, *school-building leadership team* or something similar.

When recruiting additional team members, keep in mind that successful PTA School of Excellence teams will reflect and be representative of stakeholders throughout the school and community. Consider building a team that is representative of the demographics—race, ethnicity, socioeconomic, geographic—of families at your school. Also consider gender, age and family structure. Diversity enriches the process by bringing a variety of perspectives, connections and ideas to the table.

Practice Effective Leadership Skills

It has been said that people *work for* managers, but they *follow* leaders. In order to lead your PTA and school successfully down the path to excellence, you will need to inspire others to share your vision and get excited about the process. Consider the following tips for effective leadership in diverse groups.

TOPIC	EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TIPS
Encouraging participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Be flexible in meeting times, locations and formats (e.g., face to face, conference call, email) to engage the greatest number of people. <input type="checkbox"/> Find ways for those who cannot attend planning meetings to be heard. Distribute key questions ahead of time, and invite people to submit their thoughts via social media or email.
Facilitating productive meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Develop and distribute an agenda for each meeting. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep a clock visible for all to see, and reference it when you must move on.
Communicating effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> A strong leader knows how to listen! Ask questions, invite discussion and be open to new ideas. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with your team regularly and in a variety of formats (in-person, phone, email). <input type="checkbox"/> Consider setting up a social media site (e.g., Facebook page) where team members can keep in touch and share ideas.
Managing volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers need meaningful tasks that match their unique needs and talents. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide adequate support and training for each volunteer and task. <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize your volunteers often!
Resolving conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Know your leadership style, and be aware that good leaders sometimes must adapt their style to fit the task at hand.

3. CONDUCT A FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP SCAN

As a group, your PTA School of Excellence team’s first major task will be to conduct a Family-School Partnership Scan. This involves meeting with school leaders, gathering family input and setting a shared goal and objective for the year.

Collect Information From School Leaders

Schedule a meeting with your school administrator(s) or a person designated by the principal. The purpose of this meeting will be to introduce the National PTA School of Excellence program, solicit support and learn about the school’s perspective on existing family engagement measures. National PTA has created a template agenda and survey that you can use to structure this conversation.

EXCELLENCE TOOLS

National PTA helps you every step of the way with a Web portal full of numerous templates and turn-key tools to strengthen your family-school partnership.

At this meeting, ask to review your school’s continuous improvement plan (if available). Discuss with the administrator (or representative) his or her priorities for engaging families in the following areas: **education, health and safety, and arts in education**. Where does he or she think that PTA’s involvement and enhanced family engagement could make the biggest difference?

Gain Feedback From Families

National PTA also provides a template introductory letter and survey that your PTA may use to gather feedback from your school’s families (see Web portal after you enroll).

A survey is only one option: Discussions at PTA meetings, “town hall”-style public forums and telephone calls (using the questions provided in the National PTA Family Survey to guide discussion) are other ways to learn about family members’ concerns and priorities.

Be sure to consider the following:

- Employ the methods that make sense for your school and community.
- Gather feedback from families who are representative of your school.
- Use multiple methods, if necessary, to ensure that input from *all* families is welcomed and included.

Set a Shared Goal and Objective

After you gather information from all stakeholders, it is time to compile and analyze what you have learned. In a meeting of your School of Excellence team, review the questions on the sample Family-School Partnership Scan form (see the Web portal when you enroll). As indicated, answers will come from all the members of your school community that you have surveyed.

Then, facilitate a dialogue about one shared school improvement goal. What is the biggest priority for your school—family engagement in education, health and safety, or arts in education? Within that broad priority, what is one specific objective that best describes how you will prioritize your efforts? **It is essential that this selection reflect the input from families and school leaders.**

Choose a goal and objective from a list like the one below. These are the priority issues that National PTA has developed resources or partnerships to support your efforts. Your customized *Roadmap to Excellence* will contain guidance from National PTA and its partners for the objective you select.

GOAL: Improve Family Engagement in Education

- To support implementation of college-and career-ready standards and assessment (i.e., Common Core State Standards)
- To increase family engagement supporting student success (e.g., literacy, math, science)
- To increase involvement from dads and other role models
- To create a culture and climate that welcomes all families
- To facilitate consistent meaningful two-way communication between families and school
- To grow volunteer opportunities and volunteer participation among families
- To grow family participation in school wide decision-making
- To prevent school dropouts
- To grow family participation in advocacy
- To engage community partners and raise family awareness of community resources

GOAL: Ensure Health & Safety of Students

- To promote healthy lifestyles at home and at school
- To customize and implement the local school wellness policies
- To address the problem of hunger among families in the school community
- To prevent injury at home and at school

- To promote Internet safety
- To prevent all forms of bullying and encourage healthy peer relationships
- To support students' emotional and mental well-being
- To advocate for safer routes to school (bicycling, walking, parking, busing)
- To ensure emergency preparedness, school and personal safety
- To prevent student substance use
- To promote teen driver safety
- To improve the environment for students with allergies, asthma, epilepsy, diabetes or other chronic conditions

GOAL: Support Arts in Education

- To increase access to arts programs
- To increase available resources for student learning in the arts (supplies, teacher resources)
- To build successful community partnerships
- To advocate for the values of arts in education

Complete the National PTA Family-School Partnership Scan

Once you have input from all stakeholders, one representative of your team will submit your answers to the Family-School Partnership Scan online on our Web portal. In order to be considered for the National PTA School of Excellence designation, **you must submit by the publicized due date (e.g., November 1, 2016).**

When you do—you are on your way!

4. PREVIEW NEXT STEPS

Gain Support From National PTA

Within minutes of completing the Family-School Partnership Scan online, you will receive your PTA's customized *Roadmap to Excellence*.

This report will include the following:

- More information about family-school partnerships and National PTA School of Excellence
- Ways National PTA and your State PTA will support you throughout the year
- Customized steps your school can take to achieve a stronger family-school partnership
- Recommended strategies for your specific goal and objective
- Links to relevant resources from National PTA and selected partners
- Tools to support you in leading your team, developing your action plan and promoting your progress in your selected priority area
- Information about completing the National PTA School of Excellence Application

Throughout the year, you can expect National PTA to provide ongoing support, including the following:

- Timely emails** with information about family engagement, program reminders and links to resources that support your goal for school improvement
- Webinars** on the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships
- Answers to your questions** via email at excellence@pta.org or by phone: 800-307-4PTA (4782)

Start Today!

Just over a year from now, you could be celebrating your status as a National PTA School of Excellence, acclaimed throughout your state and across the country as an example of best practice in family-school partnerships.

In the course of achieving this goal, your PTA will have strengthened its collaboration with school leaders, staff and the community; made a substantial impact on the school and student well-being; and claimed your "seat at the table" as an essential partner for engaging families and informing future school improvements.

We look forward to working with you to make this vision a reality!