National PTA®
School of Excellence
Engaging Families in Student Success and School Improvements
National PTA® School of Excellence: Program Goal

Strengthening family-school partnerships is at the core of the National PTA School of Excellence program. The goal of the program is for PTAs to partner with their schools to enrich the educational experience and overall well-being for all students by engaging families in student success and continuous school improvements.
Research shows that family engagement supports student success. PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships were developed with national experts to reflect the latest research on ways parents, schools and communities can work together to support student achievement. The standards are 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.

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.
National PTA® School of Excellence: Program Methodology

Through National PTA’s School of Excellence program, a PTA partners with its school to examine how families feel their school measures up to a number of research-based key indicators for effective family engagement. They work together to address barriers and open up new ways for families to support student success.
Schools achieve National PTA School of Excellence when families feel the school has achieved a high level of family engagement, or when the PTA and school have made a substantive, positive improvement in families' perceptions since the beginning of the school year.

This comprehensive approach to recognition levels the playing field for schools with limited resources or few families currently involved. The following outlines the specific steps to becoming a National PTA School of Excellence. To be a National PTA School of Excellence, recipients must demonstrate that they “Always” or “Frequently” achieve the research-based indicators of the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. Schools that have limited resources or low family engagement may also earn the designation for partnering with their PTA and achieving substantial progress over the course of the school year. Recognition as a National PTA School of Excellence spans two years (e.g., 2014-2016 National PTA School of Excellence).

Get Started
Build an inclusive team representing families, school staff and community members.

Conduct Family-School Partnership Scan
Survey families to gauge perceptions of family engagement. Meet with team and school leaders to identify a shared school improvement goal. Submit your results as a baseline measure.

Follow the PTA Roadmap to Excellence
Use the customized recommendations provided by National PTA to address barriers and expand methods of effective family engagement.

Measure Progress
Conduct a Family-School Partnership Scan again and submit results including proof of family survey analysis via final application form. Include a narrative that demonstrates how the PTA and school are effectively engaging families in student success and school improvements.

Celebrate Excellence
Gain recognition as a 2014-2016 National PTA School of Excellence when achieving effective family engagement. Recognition is presented to PTA-school partners with a high number of “Always” and “Frequently” responses, or substantial progress during the course of the school year. Narratives provide additional insights and determine Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award recipients.
National PTA® School of Excellence: 2013-2014 Program Reach

The following describes the quantitative results for participation in National PTA School of Excellence in 2013-2014.

314 PTAs/Schools Completing Family-School Partnership Scan (Baseline)
179 PTAs/Schools Completing Final Application
170 2014-2016 National PTA School of Excellence Recipients

It may take two years to complete the National PTA School of Excellence application process. National PTA encourages the 144 PTAs/schools that did not complete the process or achieve the designation to sustain their efforts in the 2014-2015 school year.
170 National PTA Schools of Excellence
(29 states and 1 US DoDEA school in Germany)
Not pictured: Grafenwoehr Elementary PTA, Germany

About the 2014-2016 National PTA Schools of Excellence

Serve more than 122,000 students

57% are Title 1 Schools

Two-thirds have greater than 30% of student population that qualify for free/reduced lunch
National PTA School of Excellence: Program Outcomes

Family-School Partnership Analysis

The following are key outcomes that demonstrate improved family-school partnerships generated by the National PTA School of Excellence recipients. The results reflect a comparison of information gathered from family surveys and interviews with school leaders in the fall and spring of the 2013-2014 school year.

Approximately 90% of all responses in spring 2014 were “Always” or “Frequently” compared to 74% in fall 2013.

- Welcoming All Families: 81% (Fall 2013) vs. 92% (Spring 2014)
- Communicating Effectively: 75% (Fall 2013) vs. 88% (Spring 2014)
- Supporting Student Success: 74% (Fall 2013) vs. 90% (Spring 2014)
- Speaking Up for Every Child: 74% (Fall 2013) vs. 93% (Spring 2014)
- Sharing Power: 66% (Fall 2013) vs. 85% (Spring 2014)
- Collaborating With Community: 67% (Fall 2013) vs. 90% (Spring 2014)
National PTA Schools of Excellence achieved a 53% increase in “Always” responses during 2013-2014 school year.

Welcome All Families
- Families feel encouraged to volunteer.
- Families feel school’s policies and programs reflect, respect and value the diversity in school community.
- Families feel they are treated fairly regardless of age, gender, race, or cultural background.
- School and PTA translate communications into the school’s major languages.
- School has friendly signs inside and outside to welcome families and visitors in the multiple languages they speak.

Communicate Effectively
- Families feel schools provide information about student progress and how they can support their children's learning.
- Families feel they have two-way conversations with school staff about student strengths, areas for improvement, learning styles, progress, and other concerns about the child.
- School and PTA communicate with families in multiple ways (e.g., email, phone, website).
- School provides continuous staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular, two-way communication between the school and family.
- School provides interpreters for all meetings and events when needed.
- School translates communications into the school’s major languages.

Support Student Success
- Families feel they understand the academic standards their child is expected to meet and how the curriculum is linked to those standards.
- School includes students in parent-teacher conferences as active participants in discussions of expectations and work quality.
- School involves parents in planning for transitions to elementary school, middle school, high school, or post-secondary education or careers.
- School provides a range of options and choices for a wide array of extracurricular activities that reflect student interests, goals and learning.
- School shares student achievement data with families in ways that solicit their ideas about how to improve achievement.
**Speak Up For Every Child**
- Families feel school or PTA provides opportunities to develop relationships and raise concerns with school district leaders, public officials, and business and community leaders.
- Families feel school treats their concerns with respect and demonstrates a genuine interest in developing solutions.
- Families feel PTA promotes opportunities to empower parents to advocate for the success of their own child and other children in the school.
- Families feel the school provides information and opportunities to be informed of their rights and responsibilities under federal and state laws.
- PTA fuels parent participation on school district, state, and national committees that focus on education issues.
- School informs families of the process and/or procedures to raise concerns and resolve problems (e.g. workshops, web-based materials, school handbook).

**Share Power**
- Families feel the school engages and solicits feedback from families before making important decisions (e.g., curricula, school policies, dress code and education programs).
- Families feel they are collaborative partners that share in the decision making for areas such as policy, curricula, budget, school reform, safety and personnel.
- Families feel they have input in the development of school improvement plans.
- School establishes policies that recognize and respect families' cultural, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic diversity.
- School includes parents with equal representation on decision making and advisory committees or councils.

**Collaborate With Community**
- Families feel the school is a central part of their community.
- PTA distributes information on community resources that serve the cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other needs of families within the community.
- PTA has partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and service groups to advance student learning or assist the school or families.
- PTA involves community members in school volunteer programs.
- School collaborates with community services and adult learning opportunities.
- School distributes information on community resources that serve the cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other needs of families within the community.
School Improvement Goals & Objectives
More than three-fourths of School of Excellence recipients selected family engagement as their primary school improvement goal for the academic year. Less than a one-fifth chose student health and safety as their shared goal, and the remaining two focused on arts education. The following shows the breakdown of family engagement and health/safety objectives.

**Shared School Improvement Goal: Family Engagement**

**Objectives**

- 41% Student Success
- 7% Male Engagement
- 8% Parents as Volunteers
- 10% Welcoming Culture
- 12% Effective Communication with Families
- 8% Engage Families in Decision-making
- 14% College- & Career-Ready Standards and Assessment

**Shared School Improvement Goal: Health & Safety**

**Objectives**

- 38% Healthy Lifestyles
- 3% Internet Safety
- 7% Hunger
- 7% School Wellness Policies
- 24% Bullying Prevention
- 14% Emotional and Mental Well-being
- 7% Emergency Preparedness and School Safety
Celebrating the 2014 Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award Recipients

Throughout the year, National PTA will celebrate all of its School of Excellence recipients by highlighting their successes in an array of ways. The following are the National PTA’s 2014 Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award Recipients that demonstrate why it’s so beneficial for students, the PTA, and the entire school community to focus on strengthening family-school-community partnerships.
2014 Phoebe Apperson Hearst Outstanding Family-School Partnership Award Recipient

**Eden Central PTA, Eden, NY**

Eden Central PTA spent the school year dedicated to helping families understand the changes that were happening at their school related to the Common Core Standards. In addition to providing information digitally to help parents understand these standards, the PTA hosted a Common Core Parent Information Night to provide an overview to parents on why the standards changed, the power and advantages of the new standards, and strategies to support students at home. They also hosted three “Parent Academies,” which were informal meetings to answer questions. The PTA collaborated with the curriculum coordinator to offer six “Curriculum Coffee Breaks” to provide a supportive environment for teachers to problem solve and celebrate success. In the spring, the PTA hosted “Experience a Common Core Instruction Night,” which was a workshop for parents to experience first-hand the instructional shifts, such as close reading, citing evidence, math fluency, and deep understanding for math.

Eden Central PTA leaders believe their efforts resulted in increased understanding, as well as a stronger family-school partnership. This was evident when it came time to advocate. Eden Central PTA activated their vote for the first time on New York State PTA’s Resolutions and Positions, sending a representative to participate at the New York State PTA Convention and share why family engagement and education is so important to state policymakers in Albany.

The advocating didn’t stop in Albany. Eden Central PTA’s Advocacy Committee organized two letter-writing campaigns asking parents and community members to write to their local and state policymakers to stop budget cuts to education. And when a student awards program was at risk of being cut due to budget restraints, parents looked to Eden Central PTA to step up and speak on behalf of their children. After meeting with administrators and offering PTA’s support on the initiative, the awards program continued. That’s the power of family-school partnerships.

“We are using our collective voice to speak up for every child to ensure that students have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.”

– Tiffany Kwas, Eden Central PTA
2014 Phoebe Apperson Hearst Family-School Partnership Award of Merit

Mountain View Elementary PTA, Purcellville, VA
Upon reviewing the results from the Family-School Partnership Scan, Mountain View Elementary PTA discovered they needed to reach more families. They used recommendations from their Roadmap to Excellence, such as creating a “Vice President of Family Engagement” position to lead the “School of Excellence Team.” This group of PTA members and school staff focused on creating a welcoming environment and designing family programs that appealed to all demographic groups (i.e., men, women, grandparents, financially challenged). Their goal was to make sure all parents and caregivers felt “valued and connected to their students at Mountain View.”

Mountain View Elementary PTA achieved that goal and increased PTA membership by 203% in the process! The PTA had more than 260 volunteers sign up to help with family education events, 75 dads joined the PTA’s Watch D.O.G.S. program, and new volunteers were recruited to serve as delegates to important district-level committees such as the Loudon Education Alliance of Parents, the Minority Student Achievement Advisory Committee, and the Special Education Advisory Committee. By participating in these groups, as well as school board meetings, PTA representatives were prepared to provide updates to the school community and keep families well-informed on changes or improvements to state and district level policies.

National PTA School of Excellence: Testimonials

“We began the process of becoming a PTA School of Excellence in hopes we will receive the award. What transpired has been its own award—a dedicated group of parents and teachers working together to achieve a common goal. Little did we know at the start of the process that improving our school environment would be so much fun and yield such positive results.”
— Maria Rich, Jonas Salk Middle School PTA, Old Bridge, NJ

“We look forward to receiving the next Roadmap to Excellence and hope to continue to use the tools and resources that are part of the National Standards to assess, improve, and implement Mesa Alta Jr. High School policies, practices and programs.”
— Rylee Kiddoo, Bloomfield PTA, Bloomfield, NM
“Grindstone Elementary was a brand new school that opened in 2011 and brought together students from three smaller elementary schools. Our first two years were spent building the community by being laser focused on implementing the traditional family events from each school. This year, we knew we needed to streamline our efforts and prioritize our resources. The National PTA School of Excellence program gave us the methodology to assess and identify areas of improvement and areas of strength, as well as give us the motivation we needed to get started – the distinct honor of being named a School of Excellence!”

– Heather Losneck, Grindstone Elementary PTA, Berea, OH

“Families have heard the buzz about our PTA. The basic theme of conversations seems to be ‘You all are doing wonderful things on this campus – how can I help?’ That’s exactly what we want to hear – people wanting to engage.”

– Michelle Montemayor, Hobby Middle School PTA, San Antonio, TX

“Just this year alone, we have the most PTA members ever at just under 1,000 and 100% faculty. We tripled our volunteer base from 97 to 343… we increased our Watch D.O.G.S. dads from 49 to 66. Twelve new business owners have come in to request partnerships with our school. A big success this year was the kickoff of our new Safe School Ambassador Program where student peers are mentored to look out for and stop bullying before it happens. We have 39 student ambassadors with 10 mentors.”

– Judy Steinmetz, Great Bridge Middle PTA, Chesapeake, VA