



National Standards for Family-School Partnerships



What parents, schools, and communities
can do together to support student success

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A New Way of Leading

Building family-school partnerships for student success

In the 2002 research review *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp conclude that there is a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or parents' level of education. To put it another way, when families are involved in their children's learning both at home and at school, their children do better in school. The report also points to specific types of involvement as being especially beneficial to children's academic success.



Finding 1: Involvement programs that link to learning improve student achievement.

It's simple: The more parent and community involvement activities focus on improving student learning, the more student learning improves. Learning-focused involvement activities may include

- * Family nights on math or literacy.
- * Family-teacher conferences that involve students.
- * Family workshops on planning for college.

Finding 2: Speaking up for children protects and promotes their success.

Children whose parents are advocates for them at school are more confident at school and take on and achieve more. The more families advocate for their children and support their children's progress, the longer their children stay in school and the better their children do. Families should



- * Become knowledgeable about the operations of schools and the laws that govern those operations.
- * Be confident about their ability to work with schools.
- * Expect only the best from their children and for their children.
- * Join PTA.

Finding 3: All families can contribute to their children's success.

Family involvement improves student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or parents' level of education. For involvement to happen, however, principals, teachers, and parents themselves must believe that all parents can contribute to their children's success in school. Parents can promote their children's academic success by



- * Teaching their children the importance of education.
- * Finding out what their children are expected to know and to be able to do and reinforcing lessons at home.

- * Sending their children to school ready to learn every day.

Principals and teachers must support parent involvement by

- * Making parent involvement a priority.
- * Recognizing and removing barriers to parent involvement.
- * Sharing decision-making power with parents and community members.
- * Working to understand class and cultural differences.

Finding 4: Community organizing gets results.

Engaging community members, businesses, and organizations as partners in children's education can improve the learning community in many ways. For example, community partners may be able to

- * Provide expanded learning opportunities.
- * Build broad-based support for increased school funding.
- * Provide quality after-school programs.



The findings presented by Henderson and Mapp provide a framework for strengthening parent/family involvement programs. PTA, working with leading experts on parent involvement and school-community partnerships, has updated its National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs to reflect recent research and improve parent and community involvement practices. The updated National Standards shift the focus from what schools should do to involve parents to **what parents, schools, and communities can do together** to support student success. To reflect this change, the standards have been renamed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

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, 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 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 the National Standards and PTA programs that promote family-school partnerships, visit www.pta.org.



8 Steps to a Successful Male Engagement Program



Find Strong Leadership.

You need a lead person who has a real concern or vision for men to be engaged and involved with other men to help resolve concerns or fix a problem at a school. This can be a man or woman. Every male engagement program that is effective today started with a “point person” who wanted something done to fix a concern/problem, and that person shared their concern with others.

The point person should meet with others and form a core group. The core group should plan meetings to invite other men. Wives can come so they can share their concerns.



Articulate the importance of men in education.

Do the research. Learn to speak about the importance of fathers in education. Visit websites like fatherhood.org, fatherhood.gov, and fathers.com for information. Google ‘fathers and education.’ Research says when fathers and father-figures are engaged:

- Students perform better
- Men can change the school climate by creating a greater feeling of security at school and enhance student performance
- Better grades/test scores go up
- Attendance increases/more involvement in school activities
- Bullying and disruptive behavior on campus decreases



Meet with leadership and key players in your PTA.

Meet with your PTA leadership. If necessary, build supporters and take them with you to your meeting with your PTA leaders. Remember, more communication is always better. At the first meeting, share your concern and opportunities so others understand the need and want to help be a part of the solution. This can be a specific issue related to student achievement, school enhancement or simply an opportunity for membership growth. Let people add or subtract through open discussion. This builds ownership in others.



Establish a plan of action: PTA M.O.R.E. Alliance or other local programs.

It may be helpful to have done the research and have a core plan in mind before you meet with others. There are turnkey programs that are partnering with PTA (See MORE Alliance) or you may have seen other programs in your community. You certainly can start your own venture, but there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

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Meet with local administrators for approval and support.

You have to start with the principal's support. Ask about concerns. Safety usually comes up. Know your school's volunteer and visitation policies. There are ways to honor them and allow parents to visit schools. Meet with local administrators for approval and support.

6

Recruit a male engagement team of men and women.

Find committed leadership to support your project; male or female. In most cases, mothers are the ones who bring male engagement to schools. There are men who are waiting to be asked. You can meet these men at school events, including at morning drop off. Get leadership from your school.

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Invite men to school for a kick-off or inaugural event.

Hold an event such as a breakfast, luncheon, or pizza night. Make sure your PTA is present. Have some type of child and father interaction. Have the principal and other leaders welcome and speak on the importance of fathers and father-figures.

Note: Event should be an hour or less. PTA MORE Alliance programs have the "how to" guides already in place.

8

Execute! Execute! Execute!

- Keep school and PTA leadership informed and engaged.
- Hold timely events and follow-up.
- Meet with your male engagement team as needed to celebrate "wins" and evaluate progress and personnel.
- Keep needed materials on hand.
- Repeat programs quarterly or bi-annually to "reinforce" male engagement.
- Engage men in individual one-day school visits annually.



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ABC's of Male Involvement

By Deborah Walsh and Marilyn Ferdinand

What does your PTA look like? Do men make up half your PTA members? Leaders? Volunteers? If they don't, do you know why? Do you know why men are important to PTA?

Studies show students perform better when BOTH parents are involved in education. Men and women think differently and bring different perspectives to PTA. PTAs are more vibrant and more appealing to all when both men and women help run them.

PTA wanted to know what men value about PTA and see as obstacles to membership. Therefore, in 2004, we asked our active male leadership for some advice using a poll and leaving lots of room for personal responses. About 2,700 men responded, 98 percent of them PTA members, and a large majority with students in school. Their responses helped us come up with the ABCs of male involvement.

A = Ask

Asking men. Nearly half the men polled said they were not asked to join PTA. As with every "sales pitch," asking for their membership is the strongest tool you have to get men involved in PTA.

Understand that sending a form through the "backpack express" or a flier on the PTA table at a school open house is not a very effective "ask." A real "ask" is personal and powerful. Show enthusiasm and draw on your experiences. Don't apologize for asking, and be prepared to say what your PTA is doing to help their children. Most important, make the message meaningful to men.

According to the survey, men join "to work to improve the school to benefit my child." Comments by the survey participants said that they tell men to join to:

- "Be active in your child's life"
- "Be involved with your child"
- "Help your child"
- "PTA benefits your child."
- "PTA membership is good for your child."
- "PTA supports your child."
- "PTA involvement shows your child you are interested in school and education."
- "PTA involvement shows you support the school and teacher."
- "Education is important."

The overall message should be, "Your child benefits when you join PTA."

Asking women. More than 90 percent of survey participants said their wives or significant others were already members and greatly contributed to their involvement with PTA. Yet, overall, only 50 percent of women claim their spouse is a member.

An obvious strategy for getting more men to participate is to encourage their wives to ask them. You can also modify your membership form to include spaces for the names of moms, dads, grandmothers, grandfathers, and so forth. This step can serve as a reminder that anyone can join PTA. You could also offer membership incentives, such as a drawing for a local spa treatment for every mom who recruits a male family member to join.

Ask for partners. Male community members participate in various organizations and activities, such as Kiwanis, YMCA, and Little League. The men surveyed also suggested PTA invite male speakers from typically male organizations to speak at PTA meetings about what their organizations do—and then ask for the same invitation to their groups. PTA leaders can contact these organizations to initiate joint projects, such as fundraisers, blood drives, and teen nights. Through such partnerships, you can demonstrate PTA's value to men and gain a valuable opportunity to ask them to join.

B = Bend

One size does not fit all in meeting the needs of PTA members, particularly men. Unless your unit is brimming with male PTA members, what you are doing is not working. Therefore, it is essential that you bend, that is, be flexible in your actions and thinking.

The top reason men in our survey gave for not joining PTA was time. In fact, general membership surveys PTA does regularly all say that time is the top reason why all survey participants do not join PTA. But what does time have to do with signing up as a member, paying dues, and carrying a membership card? The fact is that most people think that to belong to PTA means they have to volunteer.

Be flexible when signing up new members by differentiating member from volunteer. Members who do not volunteer show support for PTA's work, increase the morale of volunteers, add strength to PTA's voice at local school board meetings, provide funds to help PTA do its work, and so forth. Members can and do emerge as volunteers. But members and volunteers are two different things.

Men not only want to know if membership equals volunteering, but almost half of the men surveyed said they would volunteer if their roles and expectations were clearly defined. For these survey participants PTA membership and volunteering are not social activities—these men want results.

Men also want to join organizations that reflect their preference in programs, and will volunteer for programs that use their skills. Can your PTA bend to accommodate men's preferences? Can you clearly define roles, differentiate volunteer from member, state expected outcomes, and create programs that appeal to men?

Create activities that appeal to men. When survey participants were asked how to motivate other men to be involved, highly ranked was "activities or events aimed at dads." Suggestions for such activities included building projects, family events, and helping with children directly. Building projects could include classroom or school

beautification and upgrades. Helping with children events could include bike rodeos, book fairs, lunch buddies, career days, Reflections, dads clubs, and father/daughter dances. Fun family events include barbecues and cook-outs, carnivals and fairs, proms and homecomings, talent shows, family movie nights, entertainment assemblies, and ice cream socials.

C = Communicate

"C" stands for communication—the centerpiece of any effort to attract new members. What needs to be communicated? At every opportunity, communicate the value of PTA, the value of membership, the need for members, and the need for men.

Our survey asked men how to communicate effectively with them. Their #1 answer was male-oriented advertising. It is important to understand that men do not necessarily respond to "parent" as meaning "male" or "dad." They see it as any parent who is handling the family/school stuff, and often this is the mom. Therefore, communicate to dads (not parents) that they are welcome by addressing letters, announcements, and other communications to "moms and dads." Highlight opportunities and activities specifically for men.

What men want

Men told us they want fewer meetings, at convenient times. They want clear agendas, results-oriented meetings, and quick and effective meeting communication. Men prefer bulleted lists and reports, summary points, e-mail communication before and after meetings, and quick updates and reports.

When asked about meetings and communication, some men commented on their surveys that they wanted "less bickering at meetings," "reduced emphasis on fundraising," and "better communication between board members, and in general."

What everyone wants

People want to join an organization that is meaningful and successful. Does your PTA communicate its successes? Can your potential member pool differentiate what you do from what your school does? Be ready to communicate what things your school, children, and community would not have without PTA.

Communicate your successes at every opportunity and thank volunteers and members, both male and female, for making positive things happen for their children and school. End all activities, such as carnivals, fun runs, and other events, by letting nonmembers know that they can show their support and appreciation for these kinds of activities by joining PTA.

Finally, let moms, dads, and all family members know that the biggest payoff of PTA membership and involvement is the success of their children in school and in life. There is no greater gift children can get than to know that their parents and family care enough about them to get involved.

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10 Tips for Engaging ALL Families

Promote a Culture Of Acceptance, Communication, And Value Toward Families

#1: Honor families and their culture by inviting them to share information about their culture during staff development programs and staff meetings.

#2: Host a cultural celebration with a fashion show highlighting native clothing, display national flags, and post interesting facts about the country.

#3: Do not judge families on previous behaviors and work to change the culture.

#4: Personal interaction builds trusting relationships

- Wave and say hello to all adults who pass you.
- Designate staff members to be in locations for duty responsibilities where they have opportunities to interact with families
- Thank families for visiting and invite them to return.

#5: Provide opportunities for two-way communication.

- Build parent involvement into homework assignments, for example homework that involves talking with someone at home.
- Send home weekly/monthly communications that ask parents for their opinions and thoughts.

Promote a Customer Service Mentality

#6: Think about how businesses do this and work to make families feel valued and respected when they visit the school (i.e., Wal-Mart has greeters, Disneyland refers to visitors as “guests”)

#7: Make correspondence communication positive.

- Instead of signs like “no parking” or “no entry”, rephrase to say “guest parking located...” or “welcome, guest entrance is near the flagpole”
- Change “visitor” passes to “guest” passes

#8: Leave out all jargon and acronyms when communicating with families (i.e. AYP, IEP, SES, NCLB, FRL, ELL)

Promote a School Environment That Is Family Friendly

#9: First impressions are made in the Front Office.

- Have a receptionist, secretary, or student aide/volunteer welcome each person entering the office
- Post student pictures, classwork, artwork and success stories in a tasteful and appropriate manner. Show off the hard work the teachers and students do together!
- Have a bilingual staff member available to facilitate communications with non-English speakers.

#10: Complete a Family Friendly Walk Through...see the school through the eyes of a visitor.

- Does the entrance to the schools say “welcome”?
- Is the school clean and presentable?
- Can families easily find their way around school?
- Are parking spaces designated for “guests” and “family parking”?
- Is the voice mail message inviting and friendly?