Every Child in Focus
Year in Review 2013-2014

National PTA
everychild. one voice.
ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is designed to share resources and stories from the first year of the Every Child in Focus campaign. The book features:

- An example of an Every Child in Focus event and how to submit event ideas to National PTA.
- Ideas and resources to help PTAs and schools welcome, support and engage children and families in each group highlighted through the campaign.
- Statistics on each group.
- Personal stories from thought leaders and PTA members representing each highlighted group.
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In September 2013, National PTA launched Every Child in Focus, a campaign to strengthen family engagement in schools by celebrating the achievements and reporting the disparities within diverse populations, while sharing resources and advocacy tools to help school communities understand and address the unique needs of every child. Through the school-year-long series, each month we spotlighted the educational challenges surrounding a particular group, highlighting their accomplishments and focusing on ways to help foster family-school partnerships.

In the first year of the campaign, we visited communities across the country and reached out to students, families, educators, administrators and community leaders to discuss the issues and celebrate the things that make our children different and unique. We also hosted events and webinars featuring subject matter experts and thought leaders. Additionally, we worked with our country’s leaders in each group highlighted to provide dialogue, resources and information to help address issues and help school communities embrace diversity and inclusion. This book features success stories and resources supporting student achievement from the first year of the campaign.

Every Child in Focus reinforces National PTA’s mission to advocate for every child – with one voice – so all families feel invited and are equipped with the tools to support their child and improve the school, which makes a difference for every child.

I am proud to see the impact of Every Child in Focus in its first year, and I know that many more children, families and communities will be touched by the campaign as we go forward into the 2014-2015 school year.

I hope you will join me in taking action and supporting the needs of every child. I thank you for your support of the Every Child in Focus campaign and for your commitment to PTA!

Otha E. Thornton Jr.
National PTA President
## 2014-2015 School Year Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>July 2014</td>
<td>Month of the American Child</td>
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<td>August 2014</td>
<td>Month of the International Child</td>
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<td>September 2014</td>
<td>Month of the Hispanic Child</td>
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<td>October 2014</td>
<td>Month of the Urban Child</td>
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<td>November 2014</td>
<td>Month of the American Indian Child</td>
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<td>December 2014</td>
<td>Month of the Child With Special Needs</td>
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<td>January 2015</td>
<td>Month of the Suburban Child</td>
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<td>February 2015</td>
<td>Month of the African-American Child</td>
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<td>March 2015</td>
<td>Month of the Foster Child</td>
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<td>April 2015</td>
<td>Month of the Military Child</td>
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<td>May 2015</td>
<td>Month of the Asian American/Pacific Islander Child</td>
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<td>June 2015</td>
<td>Month of the Rural Child</td>
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Host Every Child in Focus Events

As part of the Every Child in Focus campaign, National PTA seeks to host an event each month that illuminates and advances issues unique to the group in focus. National PTA encourages state and local PTAs to get involved by hosting their own events or by partnering with National PTA for a joint-event.

Why You Should Host an Event

- Display inclusiveness and diversity in your PTA
- Reach new audiences
- Increase membership by appealing to diverse populations
- Share additional tools for learning
- Share resources and learn about new demographics

Submit Your Event Ideas to National PTA

Should you be interested in hosting an event in conjunction with National PTA as part of the Every Child in Focus campaign, please submit the following information at PTA.org/ECIFevents:

- The month you are interested in hosting
- Reasoning why your area is a good fit for the month/group
- The issue your event will focus on
- The goals for the event

EVENT EXAMPLE

Every Child in Focus Month of the Urban Child — Chicago Community Discussion

Event Overview

As part of the campaign to celebrate and elevate support for children and families who live in urban areas, National PTA, Black Star Community PTA and Illinois PTA brought together parents, educators and community leaders in Chicago for a discussion on ways to engage urban families, promote school safety, increase male engagement in education and PTA, and empower parents to advocate for all children.

While in Chicago for the community discussion, President Thornton also spoke about the Every Child in Focus campaign during a parent and community engagement summit at Corliss High School in Chicago Public Schools. Additionally, he participated in interviews with Urban Broadcast Media and WVON 1690AM about the campaign.

Event Goals

- Engage and empower urban and inner-city audiences to advocate for all children and address the violence plaguing the city of Chicago.
- Raise awareness of PTA’s presence in local issues by leading a community dialogue.
- Identify priorities and opportunities for next steps to further the discussion and take action to address the challenges in Chicago.
Participants
More than 60 community members participated in the discussion, which was led by President Otha Thornton; Phillip Jackson, director of The Black Star Project; Peg Staehlin, president of Illinois PTA; Ron Lawless, legislative chair for Illinois PTA; Natasha Dunn, president of the Black Star PTA; and Ruth Johnston, director for the Chicago region. A state representative for Illinois, alderman for the city of Chicago and a crime prevention specialist for the Chicago Police Department also participated in the event.

Event Outcomes
• President Otha Thornton’s presence in Chicago elevated awareness and the public image of PTA.
• The event was a great networking and development opportunity for new relationships and potential partnerships.
• The event was a good opportunity for recruitment of new UFEIN leaders.
• There was great male participation in the event.
• The event brought together diverse panelists and dynamic speakers.
• The dialogue among participants was very engaging.
• Since conducting the event, PTA has received requests to facilitate workshops at upcoming Chicago Public Schools parent events.

State, Region and Local PTA Responsibilities to Coordinate Event
Time Commitment: Approximately 40-60 hours
• Initial meeting with National PTA staff to discuss the event, goals for the event and responsibilities.
• Determine the location and plans for the event.
• Secure event location.
• Secure additional opportunities for National PTA President to participate in while in the area.
• Meet with National PTA staff to discuss event logistics.
• Reach out to local contacts to get support.
• Meet with partnering organizations and/or school districts.
• Obtain confirmations for participants.
• Market event to PTA members, business and education leaders, and members of the community.
• Create a run-of-show for the event.
• Order refreshments for event.
• Provide transportation for National PTA President.
• Secure a photographer or take pictures during the event.

Support from National PTA
• Development of invitations, fliers and other materials to help market the event.
• Provide Every Child in Focus and membership resources for the event.
• Develop talking points and background materials to prepare National PTA President and other participants.
• Arrange travel for National PTA President.
• Brief National PTA President on event.
• On-site support from National PTA staff for event.
Month of the Hispanic Child

How PTAs Can Better Support Hispanic Families

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus is centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues. This September, we turn our focus to Hispanic families and the unique challenges they face in supporting student success.

Based on National PTA’s Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore some ways PTAs and schools can welcome and support Hispanic families in the school community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Post welcome signs in the school in both Spanish and English.</td>
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<td>• Recruit Spanish-speaking families to serve as a welcome committee.</td>
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<th>Standard 2: Communicating Effectively</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Hold meetings with the help of a bilingual translator.</td>
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<td>• Have PTA announcements, materials, and invitations available in Spanish and English.</td>
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<th>Standard 3: Supporting Student Success</th>
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<td>• Provide a list of community service organizations that offer academic support to Hispanic families.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Host meetings that help families understand school performance data, student achievement data, and what they can do to help their children succeed.</td>
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<th>Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child</th>
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<td>• Organize a forum to discuss school issues and encourage families to share what’s important to them.</td>
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<td>• Develop a buddy system to involve new families in PTA and other school activities.</td>
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<th>Standard 5: Sharing Power</th>
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<td>• Make sure your PTA board reflects the demographics within your community.</td>
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<td>• Let families know how they can participate in the decision making process through forums and town halls.</td>
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<th>Standard 6: Collaborating with the Community</th>
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<td>• Partner with community members and organizations that serve Hispanic families to raise awareness on ways they can engage in PTA.</td>
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<td>• Invite community leaders to speak about issues families feel are important.</td>
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About Hispanic Children and Families

According to the National Council of La Raza, Latino children and youth are the fastest-growing population in America. Currently, 23% of children under the age of 18 are Latino, representing a critically important part of our nation’s future.

- The Hispanic population of the United States totals 53 million, making people of Hispanic origin the nation’s largest ethnic minority.
- Hispanics constitute 17% of the nation’s total population.
- It is projected that the Hispanic population of the United States will be more than 128 million by 2060.
- As of 2012, there are more than 11 million Hispanic family households in the United States, with more than 60% having children younger than 18.
- As of 2011, more than 22% of elementary and high school students in the United States are Hispanic.

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

Ways to Engage Hispanic Families

- Harvard Family Research Project: Young Latino Infants and Families: Parental Involvement Implications from a Recent National Study
- National Association of the Education of Young Children: Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and Early Childhood Education Programs
- Abriendo Puertas: A School Readiness Program that Strengthens the Leadership and Advocacy Skills of Parents with Children Ages 0-5
- Pacer Center: Bilingual workshops, individual assistance and translated publications focusing on issues facing families
- LULAC National Educational Services Centers
- National Center for Family Literacy: En Camino Educational Toolkit for Families
- MALDEF Parent School Partnership Program
Hispanics are the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States. We see this in our Head Start programs across the country where the number of Hispanic families with enrolled children has nearly doubled over the last three decades. As a nation, one of the most important things we can do is to support and engage families in the early years to ensure children succeed in school and life. Families can and do play a significant role in their children’s academic success. As parents, teachers, administrators and advocates we can strengthen family engagement in Hispanic communities by:

**Learning about the rich diversity of Hispanic families in our communities.**

It is important to understand that Hispanic families are a diverse group. They include monolingual Spanish speakers, bilingual English and Spanish speakers, monolingual English speakers, and indigenous language speakers. Hispanic families may have recently arrived in the United States or they may be second, third or fourth generation Americans. Hispanic families come from many different countries in North, South and Central America, and like any ethnic group, they deserve early childhood programs and schools that genuinely understand and respect the deep cultural roots and values that underscore their daily lives and decisions.

**Helping children identify and connect with their cultures and languages of origin.**

Give children and families opportunities at school to share who they are and be proud of where they come from. Children need family stories to root them in their culture and give them a strong foundation upon which to build their futures. The sharing of language and culture in program and school settings teaches children to feel good about who they are, and helps their peers learn to value cultural differences. It also helps families feel welcome and a part of the program or school environment. Administrators can support these efforts by being intentional about language and cultural policies and practices in programs and schools.

**Exploring families’ perceptions about what it means to be engaged in their children’s school.**

Some Hispanic families might come from the perspective that teachers are the expert and families should not interfere out of respect. In Head Start we have a long history through our requirements and mission to value the expertise parents bring to the learning process since they know their children best. Encourage parent-teacher interactions that invite conversations about family perceptions. Welcome parents to share their thoughts, concerns and questions in order to build a trusting partnership.

**Encouraging bilingualism to promote children’s academic success.**

Teachers should talk with families about encouraging their children to continue using their home language as they are learning English in programs and schools. Parents should seek out programs and schools that support both English and the language they speak at home. The research is clear that learning more than one language provides children with enhanced cognitive functions, positive language and social development. Also, as children progress into adulthood there are workforce opportunities unique to bilingual individuals. To support lifelong family communication, parents should be encouraged to continue speaking...
their home language with their children regardless of whether there are opportunities for one or more languages at school.

**Taking Advantage of these Related Resources.**

The Importance of Home Language Series includes handouts for staff and families and provides basic information on the benefits of being bilingual. Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors is a structured curriculum on language stimulation, health, socio-emotional development, and parent engagement and advocacy for Latino parents. Las Manos de Apá (The Hands of My Father) is a set of Head Start resources that focus on how to run groups and activities that engage Latino fathers around their children’s early learning.

During National Hispanic Heritage Month, we can celebrate the Hispanic community by celebrating the role of families in children’s education. One Head Start parent put it best when he said, “it’s never too late to be involved in your child’s education. Like on the banner I read [at my child’s school] ‘School is my second home, and home is my first school.’
In the heart of south Texas, PTA participation among Hispanic families is thriving thanks to a process that respects everyone’s opinion, and makes a point of seeking out parents who have been previously excluded or underserved.

PTA Comunitarios have been successful in gathering family leaders in Texas’ poorest communities. Developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association, the comunitario approach is an innovation for parent organizations and also for school-family-community collaborations. Instead of being school-based, the roots are in ‘colonias,’ unincorporated communities, in south Texas. Yet it is probably very close to the intentions and actions of the founders of PTA over a hundred years ago.

Community-based organizations sponsor and collaborate with schools to establish and maintain PTA Comunitarios. Collaboration includes co-planning, sharing in responsibilities for outreach and conducting ongoing activities to improve education in their neighborhood public schools. Connections are established with schools attended by the children of the members although the PTA Comunitario keeps an independent and separate identity.

Meetings and activities are conducted primarily in Spanish. Educational information is simplified and translated but not dumbed-down. Families are addressed as intelligent, capable and wanting the very best education for their children. The idea that parents don’t care about education is a myth. When families are treated with dignity and respect, they become the strongest long-term advocates for a quality public education for all children.

In PTA Comunitarios, family leadership in education takes the place of traditional parent volunteerism and fundraising. Family leaders in marginalized neighborhoods examine data on how their own children, and children across the region, are doing and partner with their schools to expand educational opportunity.

The organization follows the essential elements of establishing a formal PTA, and it elects officers who hold monthly membership meetings and pay the required dues. Leaders are elected from the participating families regardless of formal education, class or language capabilities. The barebones PTA structure provides a framework, but doesn’t discourage parents who may be hesitant to get involved in a full-fledge parent-teacher group.

Meetings include public school educational information and actionable data that leads to projects carried out by the membership. IDRA developed ‘OurSchool’ an online bilingual data portal, http://www.idra.org/ourschool/ that has served as a source for school transformation projects.

That first cohort of 35 families report that all of their children, mostly children learning English as a second language, who were in high school and scheduled to complete their studies, graduated and those of college age went on to higher education.

There are now 75 PTA Comunitario families working with leaders in one school district to monitor the academic success of their children and other neighborhood children. Based on this success, in late 2012, IDRA was selected by the U.S. Department of Education to expand development of the PTA Comunitario model in five communities in central and south Texas, through the i3 Initiative.
6 Key Characteristics of a PTA Comunitario:

- Meetings are held in the language of the community participating.
- Meetings are highly participatory and small group discussions are part of each session.
- Projects and activities emerge from the actionable data presented.
- Multiple opportunities for leadership are offered and many group tasks are taken on by English-learning individuals with limited formal education.
- The PTA does not take on the needs and concerns of individual families but deals with issues and challenges that affect the whole community, the whole campus or that have significant impact on many students.
- Intensive home-outreach and transportation networks are the life-blood of the group that help strengthen inter-family ties and also provide the support needed by families.

Aurelio M. Montemayor is a senior education associate for Intercultural Development Research Association. His career in education spans four decades and has included teaching at the high school, middle school and elementary school levels. He currently serves on the National PTA Field Services Committee and served as a National PTA board member from 2006 – 2010.
I often wear a PTA pin that depicts a child’s hand cradled inside that of an adult. It reminds me that I once had a dream that someone helped me to achieve. As a first generation Latina who grew up toiling in the fields as a seasonal migrant farm worker with limited means and limited access to educational resources, I should have been just another statistic. The odds that I would have completed high school were slim, and truthfully, I did not. The odds that I would then, as a single parent with a GED, could have completed college and earn a law degree from an Ivy League law school were even more remote. When I speak to students during Law Day programs, I tell them not to give up on their dreams because they, like me, are not just another statistic.

National PTA has dedicated September as the “Month of The Hispanic Child” as part of their “Every Child in Focus” effort. My PTA pin, an important reminder of the dreams I realized with the help of others, also reminds me that it is our purpose in PTA to help all children achieve their dreams. Opportunities have never been better for Hispanic families to help their children receive a great education in the public school system. Every step of the way on my journey, there was someone there stretching out a hand to help me; today, that is what we do as members of the PTA. As a PTA member and parent, I know firsthand that reaching down to the family structure to encourage student success is vitally important.

National PTA recognizes the shift in population demographics that are impacting our schools and Hispanic children. Are we ready to welcome Hispanic students and their families into our schools? Or are we missing the mark by disengaging one of the largest populations in our schools because we lack an understanding of their culture? Only through engagement with Hispanic families and extended members of the family can you raise awareness of the student’s needs. Family engagement coupled with advocacy at the local, state and national level, is the great equalizer that raises all boats and brings positive outcomes and positive change for Hispanic students.

How is this done? First, recognize the culture and respect it. Don’t try to mold Hispanic families into your school’s culture just because “we have always done it this way.” Plan Hispanic forums that feature Spanish language facilitators and bring along Spanish language materials provided by National PTA. I organized an event in my son’s elementary school, where all multicultural families were encouraged to put their customs and special ethnic foods on display while children showcased a wax museum of their heroes. The cafeteria was bustling with extended members of the family of all ages, each telling their own story of fulfilling the American dream. PTA hit a home run by reaching family members and accepting their cultural differences in an environment that encouraged discussion and sharing.

Other steps that PTAs can take include teaching Hispanic students and families how to fill out college applications, ACTs or SATs, FAFSA, etc. These tasks are something that may be common place in other families, but because these students may be the first to ever attend college or even to graduate high school, they need to learn.

Our school systems also need to understand the unique nature of the Hispanic community. In many communities, of the 4 million Hispanic students in public schools whose primary language is not English, 75% percent were born in the United States. In the
same vein, there are many children in our schools who are “culturally Hispanic” but do not speak Spanish. Yet, the community’s grip on their custom and cultures are something to honor and respect. There is still too little training, certification, curriculum and support for teachers working with students with language challenges.

PTA can take advocacy inside the school by recognizing the cultural shift and creating a Memorandum of Understanding with your school system. Meet with your school’s Social Studies coordinator and create a one-page Hispanic Culture document that can be utilized at future Hispanic Heritage programs. Finally, let’s think more creatively on how to service the needs of the migrant students who travel with their families for weeks at a time so that these students can keep up on their school work.

PTA has a unique venue to help Hispanics clear barriers to college attainment. A major reason for the small numbers of Hispanic students enrolled in college is directly related to the high incidence of drop-out rates among Hispanics. A 2009 study revealed that nearly three-quarters of all 16 to 25 year old Latino students who cut their education short during high school or failed to enroll or complete college said they did so to help support the family. This is a cultural tradition that can be addressed through family engagement and PTA is just the place to begin the dialogue. In the immigrant population, many students are being raised by a single parent or relative and there is an expectation to contribute to the family unit. Here PTA can engage families by encouraging them to play an active role in helping their students achieve. In doing so, Hispanic adults can forever alter the trajectory their students will have in life.

For those students that stay in school, academic college preparation is lacking. Latino students are less academically prepared for high school, during high school and ultimately for college. Lack of preparation is evident in lower math scores where only 12% of all Latino students scored in the top quartile of the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) reading and mathematics test. Moreover scores on the College Qualification Index indicate a 19% gap between Latino students and white students. PTA can lend a helping hand by advocating on behalf of students for adequate guidance services in the schools, adequate curriculum in secondary education and adequate level of effective English as a Second Language courses.

Hispanic students and their families place a high importance on college education. However, students often need to be coaxed out of their comfort zone to reach for their dream, el sueno. Programs that prepare, equip and motivate Hispanic youth are necessary today more than ever. We need to move from simply discussing the needs of diverse students to actively producing opportunities and solutions. The result in the lack of educational attainment has contributed to Latinos being over-represented in low-skilled occupations that pay less, with higher levels of unemployment and a greater representation on poverty rates.

Through advocacy, PTA can speak for all children with one voice, and change the current cultural curriculum in schools that fail to introduce the concept of a multicultural education. We can foster greater understanding among cultural groups to correct the omission and misrepresentation of all minority groups. We can eliminate negative stereotyping and include the history of cultural groups and their contributions. Through advocacy, PTA can speak for all children with one voice, cada nino, una voz.

Elizabeth Ysla Leight is the President-Elect of Maryland State PTA. She is a mother of three: Matthew, 12; Bianca 29 who lives in Hawaii; and Joe, 43 who lives in Iowa with his wife Debbie and three children, Joey, Austin and Gabrielle. Elizabeth and husband David currently live in Laurel, Maryland.
Month of the Urban Child

How PTAs Can Better Support Urban Families

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus is centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues. This October, we turn our focus to urban families and the unique challenges they face in supporting student success.

Based on National PTA’s Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore ways PTAs can welcome and support urban families in the school community.

**Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community**
- Structure volunteer opportunities so families can participate both on- and off-site.
- Ask a variety of parents to take turns greeting parents and students as they arrive each day.

**Standard 2: Communicating Effectively**
- Survey families and students to learn about their issues and concerns. Share your plan to address those concerns.
- Create a PTA message board. Highlight events at school and in the community, and share what parents can do to help their children at home.

**Standard 3: Supporting Student Success**
- Host forums and meetings to discuss school performance and share school progress. Explain standardized test results.
- Survey families about the most convenient times and locations for events. If the school is not in a safe area, consider a different venue.

**Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child**
- Develop a tip sheet that explains how the local school and district operate and how to raise questions about programs and policies.
- Provide opportunities for families to interact with school staff and leadership in ways that will support their advocacy efforts.

**Standard 5: Sharing Power**
- Provide opportunities for families to learn about and participate in schoolwide decision making.
- Share information with families about district level leadership and how families can attend and participate in school board meetings.

**Standard 6: Collaborating with the Community**
- Work with community organizations to make families aware of their resources, such as tutoring or afterschool programs.
- Spotlight a community-based organization in a newsletter or website to make families aware of their resources.
About Urban Children and Families

According to the World Health Organization, the urban population is expected to almost double by the middle of the 21st century. Students in urban areas are more likely to live in low-income families and less likely to graduate from high school than their counterparts in suburban and rural areas, representing a critical population in which to inspire a lifelong love of learning and increase family engagement in schools.

- Nearly one-third of Americans live in urban areas. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)
- By the middle of the 21st century, the urban population is expected to almost double. (Source: World Health Organization)
- As of 2009, more than 13,000 public elementary and secondary schools are located in large, urban areas in the U.S. (Source: National Center for Education Statistics)
- Urban schools enroll higher rates of students from diverse populations. (Source: University of Michigan)
- Children in urban areas are more likely to live in low-income families than are rural or suburban children. (Source: National Center for Children in Poverty)
- Students in urban areas are less likely to graduate from high school than their counterparts in suburban and rural areas. (Source: America’s Promise Alliance)

Ways to Engage Urban Families

- America’s Promise Alliance—Grad Nation: Grad Nation is a large and growing movement of dedicated individuals, organizations and communities working together to end America’s dropout crisis.
- Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP): Resource for research and analysis on policy related to low-income people. CLASP article on Poverty
- Khan Academy: Free tutoring website with an extensive video library that includes interactive challenges, assessments, and videos.
- MALDEF Parent School Partnership Program: A 12-session program provides parents and community leaders with the tools to become more effective advocates in improving their children’s educational attainment, schools, and community.
- National Center for Family Literacy: NCFL provides free literacy resources that parents can use with their children and online activities that families can use on their home computer.
- The National Urban League: “I am empowered. I am the Urban League” campaign for youth development.
- Parent Teacher Conference Guide: Part of the Urban Family Engagement Network Curriculum. (En Español)
- Polaris Project: Polaris Project is a leading organization in the global fight against human trafficking and modern-day slavery.
- Project Appleseed: A national campaign for public school improvement through parenting, learning at home, collaborating with community, volunteering, communication, and decision-making.
- Urban Family Engagement Network: provides an opportunity for parents, caregivers, administrators, policy makers, and community stakeholders at all levels to work together to ensure urban students reach their fullest potential.
- WATCH D.O.G.S.: A father involvement initiative of the National Center for Fathering that organizes fathers and father figures in order to provide positive male role models for the students and to enhance school security.
EVERY CHILD IN FOCUS

The Urban Child: Bhati Bowl, Dance & Tea Parties

By Kevin Chappell, Senior Editorial Manager, National PTA

It’s called the Queens Community PTSA. And as one of the few PTAs in New York City, it has become a model of how to effectively engage parents in urban communities. Camille Doherty has led the PTSA, which was chartered in 2009. She says that while all parents have an interest in taking an active role in their child’s education, tapping into that interest with fun and informative programs and activities has been the key to increasing membership and involvement. Doherty talked to One Voice about the ways the Queens Community PTSA has engaged the urban child.

One Voice: The Queens Community PTSA is not school based, but represents dozens of schools throughout Queens. Why has it been so successful?

Camille Doherty: Queens has been a very difficult nut to crack in terms of getting parental involvement... With the Queens Community PTSA, a lot of it has been the ability to have a grounded group outside of the schools where parents share a common value system...The PTSA is a natural fit because you have a community of parents, and a network of parents, and a history of parents that actually tie into the struggle of wanting to do better by their kids regardless of the economic background or your location.

One Voice: What events have had the most parent involvement?

Camille Doherty: We had our “Dream to Read” program, which will take place again this year in January, Martin Luther King’s Jr. birthday weekend. And we’ve had our back-to-school forums. We’ve sponsored a garden through the help of New York City, the Children’s Community Garden. We have a tutoring program, which is open to the community. Our Educational Ministry is a team of educators that want to make sure the parents are connected. We do parent training on how to advocate for your children and when to recognize that you should advocate for your child…We’ve picked up a strong following from a lot of our dance schools… We’ve done it with the sisterhood and the brotherhood where we have young parents in smaller sessions, and we sneak in discussions on education and what’s going on in the school and who’s doing what. But it’s done in a non-threatening type of atmosphere.

One Voice: You have received a lot of attention from your Bhati Bowl. How did that come about?

Camille Doherty: The Bhati Bowl is where our core base of membership came from. The parents loved it, and came back every week. That’s what really jumpstarted our PTA. Bhati is the Swahili word for “God’s gift.” It was a five-month program where the children learned traditional dancing like the Cha-Cha and the Merengue. We had about 26 kids, 21 families. They had fun. They had to dance with each other, boys and girls. Then, the parents had to do dance classes…it was really cute. And we had parental workshops that focused on our National PTA standards with Common Core, advocating for your children. But we also talked about our situations with the police department. So, for two hours, one Thursday night and one Friday night, the adults were in one room learning how to advocate for the children, and the kids were in one room, getting restaurant manners, learning how to use a knife and fork, learning how to tie a tie, learning how to walk with a young lady...things they don’t learn in school.
Kudos to the idea of the National PTA celebrating “Every Child in Focus,” particularly for the celebration of the urban child and President Otha Thornton’s visits to support this effort. I had the pleasure of attending a dialogue on education issues in Chicago recently, sponsored by Black Star Community PTA and the Illinois PTA.

The panel was impressive, including Otha Thornton and Illinois PTA President Peg Staehlin, Phillip Jackson of the Black Star Project, Rafael Yanez of the Chicago Police Department, Ron Lawless of the Illinois PTA Legislative Committee, and Rev. Dr. Leon Finney Jr., pastor of Metropolitan Apostolic Church.

But the real inspiration came from listening to the wisdom of elders, 85-year-old Rose Marie O’Neil who captured everyone’s attention with her heartfelt plea for greater community involvement with schools. This was not just a case of sentimental nostalgia but a realization that we have lost the sense of community where mothers – and fathers – chastised misbehavior and praised achievement of children, others as well as their own, where children could hardly walk down a block without protective eyes on them and a willingness of the neighbors to send back a report card of behavior. It was that proverbial village that we hear so much about now. Mrs. O’Neil spoke for so many others about a longing for a sense that we’re all in this together and not locked in our individual homes and apartments, struggling with our problems alone.

Later, I saw a dynamic demonstration of just that kind of community energy. Joyce A. Chapman, head of Far South Community Action Council, spoke at Corliss High School about the bragging rights she had because of the visit by the National PTA.

PTA is an old institution with a long and venerable history (one that too few know about) but also an institution with new ideas, reaching out to communities that need a solid foundation but one that allows for new energy – and new faces. I got a text message from a founder of a community PTA, a former school teacher making strong inroads into neighborhoods to develop community PTAs, glad that I’d sent her a reminder of Otha Thornton’s visit. This is a lady who’s already very involved in getting parents engaged and she was energized by the effort National PTA is putting into a focus on urban children as we all work to get back to that sense of community that Mrs. O’Neil remembers and we all want so much.

Vanessa Bush Ford is the former secretary of the Black Star Community PTA and is the current Chicago team leader of the Urban Family Engagement Network.
October is upon us. At National PTA, that means it is the Month of the Urban Child. This month’s campaign gives emphases to our education advocacy work as it relates to reaching communities where they are: in urban areas. National PTA comprises millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family involvement in schools. While PTA members may be in agreement with the PTA mission overall, urban areas have a uniqueness that warrants a focus on the effectiveness of our education advocacy work in those areas.

The beauty of the urban area is that it is as diverse as its citizens. This diversity, a broad range of backgrounds, religious beliefs, education values, and ethnicities, are unique characteristics that breathe life into the fast-paced, energetic, and close living style of the city!

I’ve had the pleasure of organizing in urban, rural and suburban areas. Regardless of the location in which the organizing work was conducted, the key aspect of my experience has been the importance of relationship building. First, you must build a relationship, develop trust, and address the community’s issue (not yours). Then you can begin to take action. You must first show a community that you care about them, you respect them, will not judge, and that you care about the desire for quality education for all children.

During my experience organizing around education issues in an urban area, I did my homework, researched the community, and knew the education issues facing the schools, economics issues facing the city, and apathy that existed for civic engagement. I was ready to take the community where it needed to go. However, I quickly realized that even with the significant training and abundance of resources at my disposal, I could not instantly require community members to move at my pace, and on my issues (regardless of how lofty). I presented the evidence of what chronically failing schools were doing to diminish future opportunities for children in the community. But the community was more focused on speed bumps for the safety of playing children and the lack of attention to ongoing bed bug outbreaks within the public housing complexes. Only once these concerns were addressed through an issues campaign (the latter receiving resolution) were parents ready to focus a campaign on school funding.

“A person has truly become a PTA member when his circle of concern stretches beyond his own child to include all children.”

– Unknown

Urban communities can make their own decisions, bring themselves together for a common cause, and rely on each other, but leaders can only be effective if they can be trusted. I have always believed that where there are problems, there is also the opportunity for solutions. The challenges I encountered organizing in an urban area, including cultural differences, overwhelming economic issues, a lack of time, a revolving door of
short term well-intended organizations with grant funding (staying as long as the money lasted), and a lack of confidence that decision makers would listen, were not as insurmountable as getting communities and parents to agree and own the fact that they can be effective at advocating for their children. Confidence and trust is achieved through the evidence of action. Keep in mind, the outcome of advocacy work does not have to result in everyone getting what they want. Sometimes simply the process of learning to advocate, speaking up for any issue, and having decision makers actually listen and take some kind of action, can be effective. Once communities experience or see the evidence of this process, they are more open to advocating for education issues.

If you have access to communities that might benefit from an education focus, take the first step and find out what the most pressing needs are. Use the PTA online advocacy toolkit to aid your efforts to expose parents and communities to advocating the PTA way. You might be pleasantly surprised at the receptiveness of our urban communities.

Stella Y. Edwards is mother, wife, special education teacher, community organizer, education consultant, radio talk show host (FM 91.3 WVST), and former United States Army Officer. For over eighteen years, Ms. Edwards has served at every level of the association. She is currently chair of the National PTA Legislative Committee.
How PTAs Can Better Support American Indian Families

National PTA's Every Child in Focus is centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues. This November, we turn our focus to American Indian families and the unique challenges they face in supporting student success.

Based on National PTA's Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore some ways PTAs and schools can welcome and support American Indian families in the school community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Invite the entire family to school events. Work on building trusting, respectful relationships with every family.</td>
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<td>• Provide opportunities for the entire family to volunteer.</td>
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<th>Standard 2: Communicating Effectively</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Invite families to lead culturally relevant craft or art projects, like teaching traditional dances, building family totems, or writing family stories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Work with tribal leaders to build the sense of community by informing your communication and outreach strategies.</td>
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<th>Standard 3: Supporting Student Success</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Offer frequent high quality learning experiences that engage the entire family.</td>
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<td>• Link all events to student learning.</td>
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<th>Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child</th>
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<td>• Advocate for culturally relevant curriculum.</td>
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<td>• Work with school staff to hold meetings to discuss educational planning so families know their children are on the right track.</td>
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<th>Standard 5: Sharing Power</th>
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<td>• Hold brainstorming meetings on school-wide issues to develop trusting relationships and build a sense of community.</td>
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<td>• Ask the families what issues are important to them and then work with them to raise those issues with school leaders.</td>
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<th>Standard 6: Collaborating with the Community</th>
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<td>• Work with tribal elders to reinforce the connection between multiple generations and young children's educational outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Plan events that engage the entire community, including local tribes.</td>
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About American Indian Children and Families

According to the National Congress of American Indians, more than 30% of the Native population is under the age of 18, compared to only 24% of the total population who are under the age of 18. This sizable young population represents a critical opportunity to ensure all youth and families are engaged, supported and provided tools and resources they need to thrive.

- American Indians are the most rural population of the United States.
- American Indians experience higher disease rates, lower life expectancy rates, higher dropout rates and higher poverty rates than any other racial or ethnic group in the country.
- More than one-third of the American Indian population is under the age of 18.
- There are approximately 644,000 American Indian students in the U.S. K-12 system, with 90% of students attending public schools.
- Academic achievement and educational attainment among American Indian students lags far behind that of their peers. On average, less than 50% of American Indian students graduate from high school each year, and even fewer enroll in and graduate from college.

(Source: National Congress of American Indians)
November is American Diabetes Month® and Native American Heritage Month. One of the American Diabetes Association’s (Association) primary objectives is to raise awareness and understanding of diabetes, its consequences, management and prevention of type 2 diabetes among high risk communities. Diabetes is far too common in the American Indian/Alaska Native communities. At nearly 16.1 percent, American Indian/Alaska Native have the highest age-adjusted prevalence of diabetes among all U.S. racial and ethnic groups. To tackle this immense problem, the Association has various programs and initiatives in place.

Awakening the Spirit is our American Indian and Alaska Native initiative. This initiative is designed for the American Indian/Alaska Native communities with tips on diabetes prevention, management and how to better advocate for funding diabetes education programs in tribal communities.

Facebook mosaic: Diabetes doesn’t stop. It is 24/7, 365 days a year. To showcase the extraordinary effort it takes to live a day with the disease, we continue to ask people to submit a personal image to our Facebook mosaic representing what A Day in the Life of Diabetes means to them. The image can be a picture of themselves or someone they care about, or otherwise represent how the disease impacts their lives. The image will then make up a larger mosaic image that will embody the message of A Day in the Life of Diabetes. I encourage you visit our page and submit your photo!

Living with Type 2 Diabetes Program: Approximately 95 percent of those with diabetes in American Indian and Alaska Native community have type 2 diabetes. We have many resources on type 2 diabetes including this free program. It is designed for the newly diagnosed and provides healthy recipes, informational packets, a monthly e-newsletter and more, to help make it through the first year of being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

Raising awareness and spreading the message of diabetes prevention and management is vital for the American Indian/Alaska Native communities. I hope you’ll join me this month in raising awareness of this ever-growing epidemic that is sweeping our nation.

Kelly Concho-Hayes and daughter

Kelly Concho-Hayes (Navajo/Acoma) is the Associate Director, American Indian & Alaska Native Initiatives and High Risk Populations, for the American Diabetes Association.

EVERY 17 SECONDS someone in the US is diagnosed with diabetes.

NEARLY 1 OUT OF 6 AMERICAN INDIANS/ALASKA NATIVES HAS DIABETES.
American Indian students account for a more sizeable portion of the U.S. public school system than you might think. According to the National Indian Education Association, American Indian students totaled 378,000 in 2010-2011. However, this number only accounts for students who are 100% American Indian; leaving out thousands upon thousands of other students who can trace their heritage back to one or more recognized tribes. These students are in every state across the U.S., with higher concentrations in California, Oklahoma, Arizona, Texas and New York. In 2000-2010, the American Indian population rose by 27%, compared to the overall U.S. rise in population of 10%.

The American Indian culture has always been, but is being recognized more and more in our schools every day. With growing populations and prevalence in the public school systems, the ways we think, teach, and learn about the American Indian culture is still evolving. There are over 500 different American Indian tribes in the U.S. today. The beliefs and practices vary from tribe to tribe. What remains consistent is the rich cultural heritage of our nation’s American Indian students.

Many tribes use a variety of artistic mediums to teach lessons and pass their heritage down through the generations. American Indians come from an oral tradition, so storytelling is a universal method of teaching and keeping culture alive. Almost every tribe holds the arts close to the core of their existence, with mediums such as song, dance, basket-weaving, or decorative arts playing an integral part in their identity. By passing down these art forms, American Indians tell future generations the story of where they come from and who they are. This is what PTA Reflections is all about; providing children an opportunity to tell a story through a painting or piece of music. The arts can communicate the history of a people, the magic of a moment, or dreams of the future. Humans have used the arts to communicate with and connect to one another for centuries. National PTA Reflections opens doors for students of all cultural backgrounds to tell the world who they are and who they want to be; to communicate with and connect to the world around them.
Meeting the Education Funding Needs of American Indian Children

By Clint Bowers

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus campaign seeks to highlight every child in our education system, and November is the month of the American Indian Child. As a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, I advocated in Washington, DC for several years on behalf of my Tribe. During my tenure, no issue was more important than ensuring an equitable education for Cherokee students. Joining the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) in 2012 to serve all Native students, I now work to guarantee their needs are addressed at the federal level, as well as in state and local governments.

Unfortunately, while the 116,000 Native students in my home state of Oklahoma are more likely to be proficient or advanced in mathematics and reading than those in other states, Native students overall are only graduating high school at a rate of 77% as compared to 86% for the majority population nationally. Out of those who do graduate, preparedness levels are disturbingly low as only one in four high school graduates are college-ready in math and one in three are prepared in reading.

Working to reverse the disparaging statistics facing Native students is fulfilling, but often overwhelming. Not because our students underachieve, but because the federal and public education systems serving those students have failed to adequately address their academic, familial, and cultural needs. Those same systems will only continue to undermine our students as draconian budget reductions under sequestration disproportionately affect our communities.

While education policy reform must increase tribal and family engagement in Native-serving education systems, sequestration – or the $1.2 trillion in automatic across-the-board federal budget reductions – is the single most important factor currently affecting our people. Critical Native education programs that increase familial involvement and address other academic needs are getting their feet taken out from under them by the federal government.

Sequestration reduced Head Start programs by $414 million in 2013, with Indian Head Start programs losing approximately $12 million. Nationwide, Head Start cuts equated to 57,000 fewer children served and more than 18,000 staff members suffering pay cuts or the loss of their jobs. As a key early education program, Head Start is instrumental for increasing Native family engagement in the earliest years of a child’s education. Such reductions will only decrease the ability for Native families to engage and assist their child as they progress through school. Additionally, Impact Aid funds that often provide a majority percentage of funding (in some cases, as much as 80 percent of an overall budget) to over 710 schools serving Native students were reduced by $67 million.

As outlined in an October 2013 report from the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS), sequestration forced school districts to reduce staff, cut after-school programs, forgo necessary construction projects, and postpone vehicle maintenance, putting children at risk. While some tribes have the ability to supplement the budget reductions, not every community has the resources available, nor is it their role, to reduce sequestration’s impacts. Even as some communities invest to maintain funding levels, as sequestration continues, their ability to assist local budgets will decrease over the long term as short-term measures are exhausted.

As cuts increase, Native communities and schools cannot expect to reverse the trends highlighted in the Education Trust’s recent report, The State of Education for Native Students. The achievement gap
will only widen as education programs and schools disproportionately reliant on federal funds have their budgets increasingly constrained. Native students – those who need equity in educational excellence most – will go unserved.

As political bickering in Washington continues over the 2014 budget and the healthcare overhaul, those focused on partisan sound bites are ensuring the troubling statistics regarding Native students will persist no matter how hard Native communities and advocates work to reverse them. As an advocate for Native students, I call on all tribes and Native education stakeholders to strengthen our resolve and voice our anger over sequestration and the failure of the federal government to uphold its trust responsibility to Native education.

As PTAs across the country seek ways to engage Native families, I call on my fellow education advocates to help this effort by ensuring that Native students are highlighted in education reform initiatives during this year’s Native American Heritage month and each month thereafter. Only through our coordinated efforts will Washington hear our calls to protect America’s most vulnerable populations. We must work together to compel Congress and the Administration to make sure Native students have equal access to a fully-funded education system that prepares them to succeed academically and become the future leaders who will ensure that Native communities thrive.

Members of both National PTA and the National Indian Education Association can take action against the sequester cuts by visiting National PTA’s Takes Action website and sending a message to Congress! Help make your voice heard in Congress today!

Clint J. Bowers currently serves in Washington, DC as the Policy and Research Associate for the National Indian Education Association and is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, located in Oklahoma.
Month of the Child With Special Needs

This December, we turn our focus to children with special needs and the unique challenge they face. Based on National PTA’s Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore some ways PTAs and schools can welcome and support families and children with special needs in their community.

**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.

- Include families of children with special needs in every way other families are included in the school
- When planning PTA meetings and events, create an environment that is accessible to all families, including those with special needs
- Develop a proactive outreach strategy that considers other challenges and barriers to participation in the school community (e.g., poverty, language, cultural barriers)
- Understand not all families want to be identified

**Standard 2: Communicating Effectively**

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication about student learning.

- Include discussion opportunities relevant to special needs, especially at PTA meetings, back to school nights and parent-teacher conferences
- Survey all families and include questions that relate specifically to families of students with special needs
- In communicating with parents about your school’s special events, include methods of communication such as braille and sign language so that parents feel welcome in the wider community

**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.

- Use information from www.pta.org/specialneeds to inform families about their rights, especially through IDEA and American Disabilities Act (i.e., Individualized Education Plan and Section 504 Plan)
- Invite all families in the school to a gathering where a special education teacher or parent shares information about resources available for families of students with special needs
- Educate teachers, parents and students to increase their awareness about the issues related to special needs
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| Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly, and to have access to learning opportunities that will support their success. | • Establish a special needs committee at each local PTA to foster collaboration among families and educators  
• Support and empower families of students with special needs to fully and effectively advocate for their children  
• Encourage parents to advocate for all students with special needs by becoming active in the PTA’s legislative committee | • Hold meetings and conferences for families to collaborate with educators and administrators to identify and address unmet needs of students with special needs  
• Encourage families of students with special needs to take leadership roles in both PTA and the broader school community |
| **Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families, and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices and programs.** | | • Hold community service events and activities that are inclusive and accessible to all those in attendance  
• Invite citizens with special needs from your community to participate in your school’s “career day”  
• Recognize community businesses and organizations that provide resources to families of students with special needs |
| **Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services and civic participation.** | | |
I am delighted that the National PTA is highlighting children with special needs this month as part of its “Every Child in Focus” campaign. Both this worthy initiative and the special needs population will undoubtedly benefit from improved awareness and engagement from PTAs nationwide.

Children with communication disorders—difficulty speaking or hearing—are among those who are being brought into focus. This is an important population to recognize as children make up a significant portion of the estimated 40 million Americans who suffer from these disorders. In fact, speech disorders affect 8 to 9 percent of young children, and hearing loss affects two in every 100 children. Many other children are affected by medical or developmental disorders such as autism with associated communication challenges that compromise the quality of life of the child and their family.

Children with communication disorders often find the school setting particularly difficult to maneuver, although it can be a place where these children can thrive given the opportunity. For many, this will be the first time a child is seen by a professional speech-language pathologist or audiologist. (Though the ideal scenario is to identify children with communication disorders before they start school, treatment at any age is beneficial.) The support of other students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the entire school community can make a significant positive difference. Also, school is a place where important information and educational resources about these common disorders can be distributed to parents, through channels such as the PTA.

Unlike most other disorders, communication disorders are reversible and even preventable with early treatment. In my career as a speech-language pathologist, one of the biggest barriers to treatment I have observed is a general lack of awareness of what a communication disorder is and what it means for a child and family. My experience is far from unique. A recent poll by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) of its members found that almost half of our respondents cited lack of awareness as the top barrier to early detection and treatment. A new ASHA public education campaign—Identify the Signs—has been designed to change this. As ASHA’s 2013 president, I have been actively involved in this effort to educate parents about the primary signs of communication disorders and the difference early intervention can make. In general, the earlier treatment begins, the better the results. As added benefits, early treatment usually takes less time to achieve a successful outcome and costs less. These are important messages for parents.

The Identify the Signs campaign offers many resources for parents, educators, and others at http://identifythesigns.org/. They include public service announcements in English and Spanish, lists of signs that parents should be aware of, educational podcasts, and a searchable list of certified providers by geographic area. Local PTAs can play an integral role by helping to inform parents, and we welcome chapters to utilize any of the resources on the website. By better educating parents and the greater public about how to recognize the signs of communication disorders early, for many children, we can prevent unnecessary struggles in the classroom, along with improving their overall quality of life.

Patricia A. Prelock, PhD, CCC-SLP, is the 2013 President of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. She is dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, professor of communication sciences and disorders, and professor of pediatrics in the College of Medicine at the University of Vermont.
The Arts Are For All!

By Tessa Raden

PTA believes that all children deserve opportunities to explore and participate in the arts and to be recognized for their achievements. While children with special needs have always been welcomed to the National PTA Reflections® program, National PTA recognizes that some children may be better served in a division that can better support their unique challenges. The Special Artist Division provides this choice.

This past year, the Special Artist Division emerged as an optional division for students whose physical, cognitive, or mental health challenges meet guidelines put forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act. This division was created as an alternative mode of entry for participants with special needs. Students with disabilities have the option to enter and participate in the National PTA Reflections program within the Special Artist Division or whichever Grade Division is most closely aligned with their functional abilities. Please check with your state PTA regarding availability in your state of residence and click here to learn more about division guidelines.

In the summer of 2013, National PTA piloted a program called the Special Artist Workshops that gave students with special needs and disabilities the opportunity to participate in intensive, high quality arts learning experiences. Workshops led by a teaching team of Special Education teachers, teaching artists, and PTA leaders provided students and their families the opportunity to learn in a supportive artistic and educational environment. This pilot is just one example of how Reflections continues to provide us with the opportunity to engage families and build strong family-school-community partnerships.

Students with special needs and disabilities experience greater challenges in everyday life than their peers. Oftentimes, they are unaware of how to express their thoughts, feelings, and dreams, and through art, they are able to blossom and find success. PTA Reflections Special Artist Division provides these students the opportunity to blossom with the added benefit of engaging their parents and communities in their success.

For more information on how students with disabilities learn through the arts visit our national partner, Kennedy Center/VSA.

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Special needs advocacy develops from a moment of choice. In that moment, you recognize that a child has special needs that are not being adequately addressed by the educational, medical, community, family, or other structures that are intended to support the child. Those that choose to recognize that the child deserves to have his or her needs met, deserves to live a safe and, fulfilled life in which they are allowed to fully realize his or her potential, have made the first step towards advocacy.

This choice can cause a moment of panic. A person may ask, “what do I know?” or “why should I be the one to speak up?” One may even feel that advocating for that child will put themselves and others at risk. But advocacy is not to be feared. Rather, this doubt and fear should be viewed as an opportunity to confront the challenge and begin the process of gaining the skills and knowledge that it takes to be an effective advocate for children with special needs. It can be a difficult choice for families to speak up for their child, or for school staff to support necessary changes, but the reward outweighs the risks.

Once you express your concerns, request a meeting, or ask for an evaluation for your child, you are an advocate. Hopefully, you are met with a supportive response, but you may be met by an individual who resists change or cannot see a need to revise school special education policies. The law requires schools to meet minimum expectations, which some may feel is enough. This is the first lesson of advocacy: It is rarely fast and easy. In the majority of cases the system wants to do nothing, or at best continue to simply meet the minimum requirements.

This may leave you discouraged and frustrated, but persistence is key. At some point, a teacher, a parent, administrator, or even another advocate will thank you for speaking up for this child. They may have been afraid to speak up, have felt they did not have the skills, or were just unaware of the need. This is the second lesson of advocacy: you are not alone. There is strength in numbers.

Reenergized, you do not take no for an answer from the system and begin to arm yourself with knowledge and information to bring to the table. You can begin by reaching out to your local PTA or by contacting your state’s Parent Training and Resource Center. You quickly learn that many at this table, including the experts, are missing important knowledge and understanding of the law, special needs, and how to protect and support children with special needs. This is the third lesson of advocacy: you will spend as much or more time educating others as you do directly advocating. You persevere; you keep calling meetings and slow progress is made towards meeting the child’s needs. This is still frustrating, but you can begin to see the difference in the child’s life.

Then it happens, a parent, teacher or someone else comes to you for help. They have recognized your advocacy skills and tell you a story of a child whose needs are not being met. Pretty soon you begin to advocate for many children, not just yours. The school begins to want your help and knowledge, and progress towards meeting the child’s needs happens quickly. It is almost like something magical has happened or you are in another world. Of course, often it can be the same old battles over and over again, but as we learned before, advocacy is not always simple or easy and slow progress is better than no progress.

You come to the realization that you cannot help all children individually, and that only system change can end the need for these individual battles. On
to the next level: enforcing the existing laws and working at the state and federal level to improve the laws that protect children with special needs. You find allies and help with drafting, passing, and implementing legislation. You come to fully appreciate the final lesson of advocacy: it is hard work and never ends. But the reward is that you are making a difference in children’s lives, and this work will benefit them for a lifetime.

The above path is a compilation of my journey as a volunteer parent advocate of a child with a disability and that of many other advocates that I work with. Where do you fall in this story? Do you want to begin or need help with your advocacy? Remember there is power in numbers and that PTA is first and foremost an advocacy association. Does your local PTA have a special needs or exceptional child committee, or an advocacy or legislation committee? If not, check your region or state PTA. You may also contact the National PTA Special Needs committee, or check out the Special Education Toolkit on National PTA’s website. Always remember this: you are not alone in your journey to improve the lives of children.

Yes, I see everything though an advocate’s lens, and would not change it for anything. I am making a difference in improving the lives of children and there is no better calling for me. If you are thinking of speaking up for a child with special needs, always remember this: you are not alone in your journey to improve the lives of children.

Bill Doolittle is the parent of a child with special needs and a member of National PTA’s Special Needs committee. He resides in Delaware.
I remember talking to a friend many years ago who spoke about having a special needs child and compared it to preparing for a vacation to a foreign country, learning a new language, preparing for the sites to see and the places to visit and when the plane landed, lo and behold she ended up in a different country, with a different language and while it was not what she thought it would be it was still wonderful and beautiful.

That is how I felt being assigned to National PTA’s Special Needs committee, I was prepared with my PTA knowledge and thought I knew the education jargon/language but boy was I wrong. I attended my first committee meeting, still knowing very little about special needs programs and immediately realized I had to learn a new language. IEPs, IDEA, FAPE, 504’s, SEPTA and the list went on and on. The committee members were very understanding and patient with me and aided me in my slow but gradual learning process. I was lost and confused just as I am sure many parents are when their child is diagnosed with special needs. I started asking questions and received direction from the committee members on where to turn. I needed to do some research and naturally went to the PTA.org website. On the website I found a Special Needs Toolkit that had answers to the questions I was having and even more information than I ever thought I would need to know. I cannot imagine what parents need to do when their child is diagnosed with special needs and where do they turn but now I can refer them to PTA.org/specialneeds.

On this website, there is an amazing section devoted to special needs. Starting with:

**Getting Started:** An introduction to the Special Education process and how to advocate for your child.

**From Pre-K to Graduation:** Transitioning your student throughout his or her school career and preparing them for college or the workforce after graduation.

**Understanding Federal Policy:** An overview of federal disability and special needs policies, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

**A Parent’s Dictionary:** Key terms to know when getting started in special education.

**Acronyms:** An overview of acronyms used in special education and disability policies and programs.

**Resources:** A directory of tools and organizations that families can access for assistance.

This is a fantastic tool, with great information, and relevant resources. Help those who need this by referring parents, teachers, and school districts to PTA’s Special Needs Toolkit.

While I am sure that being on a committee is nothing compared to having a special needs child, I do know one thing, every child is entitled to a great education. Sometimes getting that for our children takes us down a different road, but the journey is worth it to see our child, your child, all children succeed.

Kathy Nevans is a member of the National PTA Board of Directors and the Board liaison to the Special Needs Committee. She is from Independence, MO.
School Bus Safety and the Role of the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

By Linda Bluth

The school bus plays an essential role in the everyday lives of families across the nation, particularly for families with children receiving special education and related services. Most children with disabilities ride the same school bus as their non-disabled peers. They often require little or no special assistance. However, some children with disabilities require very specific planning in order to receive a safe ride to school.

The entitlement for children with disabilities to receive free and appropriate transportation service is firmly established in two federal laws: The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (more commonly known as Section 504) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If you have been told that your child requires the related service transportation or you believe that your child needs specialized transportation, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process is the appropriate means for discussing your child’s specific transportation needs. IDEA requires that transportation needs be addressed on a case-by-case basis when your child requires services different from children without disabilities.

It is crucial that IEP team members, including yourself, provide input about how your child’s disability impacts riding the school bus safely. The IEP team meeting and the IEP document should address accommodations and supplementary aids and services required to assure safe and appropriate transportation services.

Here are five tips families can follow to increase a child’s school bus safety:

1. Be familiar with school district’s school bus policies and procedures for students with disabilities.
2. Utilize the IEP process to address transportation if individualized services are necessary. Be sure to ask questions about the specific training received by the bus driver and attendant to meet your child’s needs.
3. Provide relevant information about the impact of your child’s disability on the school bus ride.
4. The most dangerous part of the school bus ride is getting on and off the school bus. This is referred to as “The Danger Zone.” The “Danger Zone” is the ten (10) feet in front, behind and on each side of the school bus. Make sure that your child receives appropriate supervision at all times while in the “Danger Zone.”
5. Have readily available contact numbers of those individuals responsible for the transportation of your child.

It is reassuring to know that the school bus is recognized by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) as the safest form of travel to and from school. Parents of children with disabilities are essential partners in ensuring that their child’s school bus ride is a safe ride. Parents also help to ensure that the ride is a positive experience prior to arriving at school and after leaving school. Remember, the school bus ride provides the very first step to a meaningful education for many of our nation’s children.

Dr. Linda Bluth has 48 years of experience as a special educator, including 33 years in special needs transportation. Her past experience includes work at the United States Department of Education (USDE) and as a University Professor; School System Administrator; and Policy Specialist in the Maryland Governor’s Office for Children Youth and Families. She is a past-president of the National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT). Dr. Bluth currently works at the Maryland State Department of Education as a Special Initiatives Program Specialist.
How PTAs Can Better Support Suburban Families

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus is centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues. This January, we turn our focus to suburban families and the unique challenges they face in supporting student success.

Based on National PTA’s Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore ways PTAs can welcome and support suburban families in the school community.

**Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community**
- Develop a proactive outreach strategy that considers other challenges and barriers to participation in the school community (e.g., poverty, language, cultural barriers).
- Recruit family volunteers from different neighborhoods and train them to serve as mentors to other families to help them become more engaged in the school.

**Standard 2: Communicating Effectively**
- Work to develop an agenda for small-group dialogues to be held in different neighborhoods on issues such as school security or homework expectations.
- Build a diverse team of families and PTA leaders to meet monthly with the school leadership and address school wide issues and appropriate responses.

**Standard 3: Supporting Student Success**
- Organize a database of parent and family skills, expertise and backgrounds through which teachers can find resources.
- Collaborate with school leadership to hold regular family learning events at workplaces and community locations.
- Work with the school to identify local community partners who provide after-school programs for children and families and then help to distribute the information school wide.

**Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child**
- Work with the district to host workshops and meetings for families about school and district programs, policies and resources. Be sure to provide the events in various languages and locations throughout the community.
- Work with families whose children are underrepresented in advanced classes to encourage their sons and daughters to take higher level courses.
**Standard 5: Sharing Power**

- Work with the school improvement team to adopt effective strategies to engage families in reducing achievement gaps between groups of students.
- Build the PTA’s effectiveness by recruiting and maintaining a leadership team that reflects the school and community and by aligning all programs and practices with PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

**Standard 6: Collaborating with the Community**

- Work with school staff to create a comfortable, inviting family resource center. Staff and parent volunteers should use the center to inform families about services, make referrals to programs and plan activities.
- Work with community and business representatives to assess school needs, develop programs to support student success and find creative ways to provide funding and staff.

**About Suburban Children and Families**

- As of 1990, 14 percent of school districts are located in suburban areas, enrolling 36 percent of all students. (Source: National Center for Education Statistics)
- Over the last 20 years, suburban communities have experienced a rise in poverty and homelessness. (Source: Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness)
- Poverty in suburban communities has been growing at a faster rate than in urban areas. (Source: Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness)
- According to a U.S. Census Bureau report released in 2010, the country’s biggest population gains were in suburban areas, because of minority populations increasingly residing in these areas. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)
- According to the 2010 Census Bureau report, more than a third of all 13.3 million new suburbanites were Hispanic, compared to 2.5 million African Americans and 2 million Asians. Caucasians accounted for a fifth of the suburban growth. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)
Mapleton Public Schools—a suburban district just north of Denver, Colorado—serves more than 7,600 students from Pre-K through grade 12 in its 15 schools. Though its enrollment numbers have remained steady in recent years, this district has been grappling with significant changes. In the span of a decade, the number of Mapleton students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch doubled. By the 2010-11 school year, more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the student body was eligible for subsidized meals. As the number of low-income students has climbed, so too has the need for extra assistance that will help kids be ready to learn—from clothing and food to additional academic support.

Mapleton Public Schools isn’t alone. Suburban districts across the nation’s 100 largest metro areas have become home to growing low-income populations in recent years. In the last half of the 2000s, the number of suburban students eligible for free and reduced-price lunches grew by 22 percent, compared to an increase of just 8 percent in city districts during that time. At the same time, many school districts are also seeing more students experiencing homelessness.

These trends reflect larger shifts in the geography of poverty within the nation’s largest metro areas. Between 2000 and 2012, the population living below the federal poverty line in the suburbs (roughly $23,500 for a family of four in 2012) grew by 65 percent—more than twice the pace of growth in large cities and faster than the increases registered in smaller metro areas and rural communities—making America’s suburbs home to the largest and fastest growing poor population in the country. By 2012, one in three of the nation’s poor lived in suburbs, and the suburban poor population outstripped the urban poor by 3 million.

Many different factors have driven the rapid rise in suburban poverty since 2000, including changes in the location of affordable housing, the continued outward shift of employment, the impact of two economic recessions, and the growing prevalence of low-wage jobs, the bulk of which are located in the suburbs. Together, all of these dynamics have helped shape the growth in suburban poverty that has touched almost every major metro area in the country.

However, many suburbs lack the kinds of resources and infrastructure that cities have built up over decades to address poverty. The suburban safety net is often patchy and stretched thin, and limited (or no) public transit can make it difficult for poor residents to find affordable transportation to reach services or job opportunities that lie elsewhere in the region. As rising poverty strains limited resources in these communities, suburban schools like Mapleton often find themselves on the frontlines, not only in identifying growing need, but also in responding by trying to fill capacity and resource gaps.

Mapleton Public Schools falls largely in an unincorporated part of Adams County, meaning there is no local government structure like a city council to help provide support, nor are there resources like a recreation district, library, or a human services office, leaving it largely to the school district to address the needs of its low-income students and their families. Moreover, the public funding the district receives hasn’t kept up with the rapid rise in need it has experienced in recent years, and although Mapleton has stepped up its efforts to attract grants and philanthropic funding to supplement these dollars, even hiring a full-time...
grant writer, the district still struggles as philanthropic funding has disproportionately gone to the city.

Yet even in this challenging funding environment, Mapleton is one of many suburban districts finding ways to bring much needed resources to help its growing low-income population of students succeed. By partnering with local, state, and national organizations and soliciting donations for things like mental health services, school supplies, and feeding programs, Mapleton has managed to craft a robust continuum of wraparound support services, including school-based therapies, a summer feeding program, a food bank, a clothing bank, and a dropout recovery high school. With this integrated, multifaceted approach to addressing the needs of its low-income and at-risk students, Mapleton’s staff has already seen improvements in the academic performance and outcomes of its students.

In researching our book *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America*, Alan Berube and I found suburban schools in regions across the country, from the Cleveland suburb of Lakewood, Ohio to the South King County districts that make up the Road Map Project in metro Seattle, that, like Mapleton, were taking the lead on filling gaps in capacity through more scaled, collaborative, and integrated strategies to address the complex needs of their low-income students. While this type of approach often extends well-beyond a school district’s educational mandate to respond to basic needs, as Mapleton superintendent Charlotte Ciancio asked when we spoke last October, “If not us, then who?”

While there is clearly a need for more (and more sustainable) resources to help suburban districts respond to these growing challenges, these models underscore that collaboration and partnership can go a long way in helping communities like Mapleton stretch limited resources to improve outcomes for low-income students. For suburban schools grappling with similar challenges, there are many ways for parents, educators, and community members to get involved—from collecting and sharing information to help educate stakeholders on how needs are changing, to collaborating with other districts experiencing similar challenges, to partnering with government officials, nonprofit organizations, and others to more effectively respond to rising need. To learn more, or to share how your community is addressing suburban poverty, visit www.confrontingsuburbanpoverty.org.

Elizabeth Kneebone is a fellow at the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings. Her work primarily focuses on urban and suburban poverty, metropolitan demographics, and tax policies that support low-income workers and communities.
Month of the African-American Child

How PTAs Can Better Support African-American Families

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus is centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues. This February, we turn our focus to African-American families and the unique challenges they face in supporting student success.

Based on National PTA’s Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore ways PTAs can welcome and support African-American families in the school community.

**Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community**
- Work with families from all neighborhoods and backgrounds to assume collective responsibility to identify and break down barriers to family engagement related to race, ethnicity, class, family structure, religion, and physical and mental disabilities.
- Develop a volunteer program that reaches out to parents from all neighborhoods and backgrounds, identifies their unique experiences and skills, and offers varied volunteer opportunities for both home and school.

**Standard 2: Communicating Effectively**
- Survey families and students to learn about their issues and concerns. Share your plan to address those concerns.
- Create a PTA message board. Highlight events at school and in the community, and share what parents can do to help their children at home.

**Standard 3: Supporting Student Success**
- Ensure that all parents are included on school committees and that they represent all of the diversity throughout the building.
- Host meetings for the principal to present regular progress updates on reaching academic goals and progress.
- Provide families with strategies they can do at home to help their children reach those goals.

**Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child**
- Build social capital. Help parents to meet each other to reduce feelings of isolation and a lack of confidence.
- Empower families to advocate for their children. Plan workshops on how to ask the right questions about their children's placement and progress.
- Work with the school staff to provide information sessions about programs such as Gifted and Talented, International Baccalaureate or Advanced Placement classes. Reach out to underrepresented populations to ensure access and equity for all.
About African-American Children and Families

- In 2012, there were more than 10.2 million non-Hispanic black children under age 18 living in the United States or 14% of the U.S. child population.
- Approximately 40% of non-Hispanic black children under age 18 live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level.
- In 2009-2010, 34% of non-Hispanic black high school students were not graduating on time.
- In 2009-2011, 51% of non-Hispanic black children ages 3 to 4 were not attending preschool.
- In 2011, 87% of non-Hispanic black 8th graders scored below proficient in math level.
- In 2011, 84% of non-Hispanic black 4th graders scored below proficient in reading level.
- Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Special Education Programs for Fall 2008 show that although African-Americans represented just 15% of all students, they represented 21% of students in the special education category of specific learning disabilities, 29% in the category of emotional disturbance, and 31% in the category of mental retardation.
- African-American students without disabilities are more than three times as likely as their white peers without disabilities to be expelled or suspended.
- Although African-American students represent 15% of students in the CRDC, they make up 35% of students suspended once, 44% of those suspended more than once, and 36% of students expelled.
- More than 50% of students involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement are Hispanic or African-American.

(Source: KIDS Count Data Center of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights)
The Need for Male Role Models in African-American Communities

By Michael Knowles, National PTA Male Engagement Committee Chair

Exactly 20 years ago, the Child Care Association, the Chicago Urban League, and the State of Illinois asked me to take on a non-profit project in Chicago to support a large number of African-American children who were least likely to be adopted because of age, race and negative perceptions. The goal was to put in front of them successful and positive male role models or find men who would consider becoming adoptive fathers for this unique group of children.

Having watched a sister and close female friend successfully raise boys on their own, my first question to my new employers was, “Why are we only looking for men in our search for role-models and prospective parents?” After all, my experience was that women usually stepped forward, and I was sure this would make my job easier. The answers for them were clear and simple. “In order to be a man, you need to see a man,” I was told by one staffer. Another said “young girls need to see positive examples of maleness, so they know who to choose as a life partner.” Sounded fair, but I was sure there were many exceptions.

According to 2011 U.S. Census Bureau data, more than 24 million children live apart from their biological fathers. That is one out of every three (33%) children in America. In the African-American community, nearly two in three (64%) of African American children live in father-absent homes.

I was blessed to have grown up in a neighborhood with so many present and great African-American and Latino fathers. I am biased, but I have always thought that African-American and Latino fathers had to guide their children and families through a very different societal maze than other American fathers. I experienced this firsthand during my youth when being hit with the challenges of race in America.

I praise those fathers who have survived through the winds of injustice and change and mourn those who have fallen to a variety of unfortunate and unjust circumstances; but regardless of your perspective, it is easy to recognize that this absence of men in America’s African-American communities is at the heart of the crisis.

For a variety of reasons, including the lack of jobs, equal education and crime, many of those communities are now gripped in deep violence and fear. Strong, positive, hard working men are there, but in too many situations are not as visible or engaged with their kids or the other kids in the community. It is as if they leave home, go to work, come home and lock themselves inside their homes in front of TV sets. Not as many are walking the streets in the evenings, standing at the corner by the school bus stop, sitting in the church, or volunteering at the park or school.

For the sake of our children, this is the paradigm; we have got to reverse it. The movement to get more positive fathers engaged in schools, church and in the lives of children throughout their community has to become a priority. Here is a suggested four point strategy for renewal.

Step #1 – Jobs: African-American fathers, like all fathers do, want to provide for their families and children. Last month, the jobless rate among whites was 6.6%; among blacks, 12.6%. Over the last 40 years with a brief exception, at the height of the recession, the unemployment rate for blacks has averaged about
2.2 times that for whites. The lack of esteem that comes with the inability to provide for your children and family leads to a variety of challenges and ills for an individual of any background and color. Ask anyone you know if not being able to support their loved ones would have any effect on them. No brainer! Implore your politicians and community leaders to have no other first priority except jobs, jobs, jobs and more jobs.

**Step #2 – Education:** Very related to the first step and equally important to the future, is effective and equal education. More than 50% of male African-American high school dropouts are unemployed, according to a new online analysis of unemployment data by Remapping Debate, a left-of-center news site in New York.

From my perspective there is a clear role in this for PTA. Helping African-American fathers engage in securing a fair and robust education for their children should be a top priority. The research is clear, engaged and active fathers and father-figures can help ensure better grades in elementary and secondary environments and raise the levels of college attendance. Their involvement—says the overwhelming research—can stem the tide of damaging social behavior that is detrimental to their futures, including bullying, gang involvement, drug use, incarceration and teenage pregnancy.

**Step #3 – Community Involvement:** There absolutely has to be a renewed sense of responsibility to one’s community. Responsible fathers and males in the African-American community have got to become more visible. Churches, fraternities and businesses can provide guidance and establish male engagement programs that implore men to be mentors and friends. Block clubs or Father Clubs can be re-established with a mission to man school walkways or school bus stops. Just don’t go home and close the door! A 15-minute walk, when children are on their way to school or a walk to the park in the evening after returning from work could go a long way. If children see you caring about the community, they will learn to. Any responsible male should take on the mantra that “All the children in the village are mine.”

**Step #4 – Spiritual love:** I am not talking about religion, although religion certainly can play a part, but what I am talking about is the human spirit. Inside all of us are both the need to be loved and a need to share love. This is the true meaning of humanity and charity. Children need to see that spirit in others, to see it in themselves. I used to tell my staff at the old Washington Park YMCA on Chicago’s south side that the children we work with won’t learn empathy for others if they never see it in us. An educator once told me, that regardless of how cold the environment a child sees at home, a warm environment at school, church or in the community gives them a chance. If they come from a cold home to a cold community environment, they have no chance! Educators know this and fathers and PTAs should too!

Fathers and father-figures are and can become even greater examples of this spiritual love for our children. So much so that Joe Vitrano, a PTA member from Ohio and a member of the National PTA Male Engagement Committee, has asked that the acronym L.O.V.E. become the theme of our committee’s work for and with youth in 2014 and 2015. It stands for Listen, Observe, Validate and Embrace. These are valuable actions and guidance that African-American fathers and all fathers can implore to ensure healthier, stronger more successful children.
PTA’s Continuing Relevance for All Children

By Brian Bonner

“You guys aren’t just about tea and crumpets, are you?”
“I thought PTA was just for fundraising.”

These are two quotes that I distinctly remember from my time as a district president with the California State PTA as we worked with the County Office of Education and the Urban League on efforts to improve educational success for African-American students in San Diego County.

The County Office of Education, the San Diego Urban League, and Ninth District PTA collaborated on a series of events designed to improve teaching for black students in the region and to holding a parent involvement event targeted at African-American parents. We also participated in a presentation to a group of County Board of Education trustees, County superintendents, and National leaders from throughout California at an event in Palm Springs. The events included a presentation from a linguistics expert on the origins of Black English and methods for teaching these youngsters to code switch as appropriate for the situations they are in. We also had a presentation for educators from a very successful administrator of a school that had a substantial majority of African-American students. Both of these speakers provided insight on ways to improve academic success for African-American students.

Ninth District PTA also participated in the new era (Everyone Recommitting to Academic Achievement) back to school events targeted at students in Title I schools in the San Diego Unified School District. We had the good fortune of receiving a large number of backpacks and school supplies from the Office Depot Foundation that we could donate to the event. The back-to-school event served 3000 students and parents in August with a series of workshops for parents and students with the aim of preparing students and families for the upcoming school year.

During the second year of our participation in this event, National PTA president Jan Harp Domene spoke to several hundred participants in the opening session. Going back to the first quote, I was explaining to a representative of the Urban League that California State PTA sponsored legislation to require parental notification when the police sought to interview or interrogate a student at school. Given the disproportionate contact of minority and low-income students with police agencies, this gentleman understood that the benefit of this effort would reach students that the urban league also placed as a high-priority.

With regard to the second quote, the Urban League representative and I were teaching a class about advocacy to a group of parents at the parent event we organized. We were interrupted early in the presentation by a teacher who said, “I thought PTA was just about fundraising.” I took the opportunity to go off script and give a brief history of PTA’s advocacy legacy and reminded the audience that PTA came into existence to advocate on behalf of children. This was news to the teacher and to some other parents in a room. We explained to the room that advocacy was simply speaking up for children with their teachers, principals and other people in authority who come in contact with their children. Speaking up for children seemed a lot less scary to the participants than the word advocacy.

Benefits of participation with these groups included a greater understanding that PTA is relevant in all communities where kids attend school. Our involvement in these events helped create a great understanding that PTA is relevant in all communities, seeks to engage families of all walks of life, and that our message of every child, one voice actually does include all children.

Brian Bonner currently serves as California PTA’s Federal Legislative Chair and as the Vice Chair of the National PTA Legislative Committee.
A Field Trip To Remember
By Erin Clark, National PTA Arts in Education Fellow

On a cold, rainy morning in January, the U.S. Department of Education auditorium filled with excited chatter while PTA members, arts education professionals and families from across the nation took their seats for the National PTA Reflections® program’s art exhibit opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony featuring the 2012-2013 theme: The Magic of a Moment.

The ceremony recognized over 200 student artists from across the country with special guest appearances by national award recipients, Bailey Callahan and Jessica Clay. U.S. Acting Deputy Secretary of Education Jim Shelton, President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities Executive Director Rachel Goslins, National PTA President Otha Thornton and National PTA Reflections Committee Chair Dawn Small discussed the significance of the arts, the benefits of arts education and the importance of integrating the arts into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).

Read more about STEAM (STEM + ARTS) in Our Children magazine Dec/Jan edition.

After the ceremony, the visiting families mingled with a whole class of local students from Amidon-Bowen Elementary School who graciously attended. The young arts-enthusiasts took time out of their day to celebrate the arts and the humanities with the PTA. This was truly a magical moment.

We soon learned that this was just one of many arts-based field trips Washington, DC students experienced due to their school’s partnership with the DC Arts and Humanities Education Collaborative (DCAEHC). This collaborative partnership provides students with access to over 70 artists and arts organizations to “bring standards and curriculum to life.”

DCAEHC Program Director, Tracey Alperstein, explains that through school-community partnerships, students attend field trips and receive in-class arts learning. In addition, teachers also receive training in arts integration as well as conflict resolution.

The DCAEHC supports many DC area schools like Amidon-Bowen, with ninety-two percent minority students. Their experiences in the arts and at the PTA Reflections exhibit will be remembered for years to come, fostering a life-long appreciation for the arts. Hopefully, this gleeful class will be inspired by this year’s Reflections participants to explore their own creativity.
Month of the Foster Child

How PTAs Can Better Support Foster Families

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus is centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues. This March, we turn our focus to families of foster children and the unique challenges they face in supporting student success.

Based on National PTA’s Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore ways PTAs can welcome and support foster families in the school community.

**Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community**
- Recognize that children in foster families are often difficult to identify due to privacy concerns. It is often a matter of self-disclosure after joining the PTA.
- Welcome all new children and their foster parents to the school with a tour and a meeting with the principal and school social worker or counselor. Making the student and their families feel welcome and connected to their school community is even more critical to their success.

**Standard 2: Communicating Effectively**
- Survey foster parents to determine their educational support needs and how the PTA can help address those needs.
- Invite a social worker from the school or the foster care agency to write child welfare and foster care articles for the newsletter, the website, etc.

**Standard 3: Supporting Student Success**
- Children in foster care may miss many days of school or enter school mid-term. Encourage teachers to provide a syllabus to identify learning content, establish expectations, and help a foster parent understand what content has been covered to date.
- Provide specialized PTA family engagement training to raise and sustain academic achievement. Cover the effects of traumatic stress on children, their health, behavior and educational outcomes.

**Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child**
- Every year there are proposed state bills affecting child welfare and often more specifically foster families. Form a committee to keep all families informed about proposed child welfare legislation and encourage them to advocate for the foster care/child welfare bills they support.

**Standard 5: Sharing Power**
- Recruit foster parents to represent the PTA on the School Improvement Committee
- Recruit foster parents to serve in leadership positions in the PTA.
About Foster Children and Families

- Nearly 400,000 youth were in foster care in September 2012 and approximately 250,000 of those youth were school-aged.
- 52% were male and 48% were female.
- During his/her first foster care stay, a youth experiences an average of 2.8 living arrangements.
- Students in foster care are twice as likely to be absent from school than other students.
- More than half of students who enter the foster care system must change schools and more than a third of 17-18 year olds in foster care have experienced 5+ school changes.
- 17-18 year olds in foster care are twice as likely to have an out-of-school suspension and three times more likely to be expelled than other students.
- The average reading level of a 17-18 year old in foster care is 7th grade.
- Students in foster care are 2.5-3.5 times more likely to receive special education services.
- Only half of students in foster care complete high school by age 18.
- While 84% of 17-18 year olds in foster care want to go to college; only 20% of students in foster care that graduate from high school attend college.
- Only 2% to 9% of youth in foster care attain a bachelor’s degree.

(Source: Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care, 2014)

Ways to Engage Foster Families

- Child Welfare Information Gateway
- Legal Center for Foster Care and Education
- National Foster Care Coalition
- National Foster Parent Association
- Children’s Defense Fund
- Support Students in Foster Care
- Improving Educational Success for Children and youth in foster care
- Foster Care for Children: Information for Teachers
Steve Pemberton admits that he should have told his story some 20 years ago. But sometimes recounting pain is as tough as living through it.

The married father of three now lives a blessed life as a Fortune 50 company executive in Chicago. But behind his storybook exterior is the tragic tale of a tattered foster kid from Massachusetts, a forgotten child, a ward the state labeled as “at-risk” before proceeding to shuffle him from one suspect family to the next, each taking him in more for money than love.

In the sprint to achieve his current success, the horror of his past has always given chase. Doing right by his family helped distance, but not shake, the childhood memories of physical beatings and mental abuse that included everything from being forced to rummage through trash cans for dinner to hiding books under the stairs because his foster parents told him to stop reading so much.

It would eventually take talk—not walk—therapy to finally free Pemberton’s heels, heal his pain, and give him the time and space to help others.

“Becoming a husband and a father, my children were filled with questions about my mother and father. Where were they? What happened to them? One question which led to another question, and another question,” says Pemberton, who wrote the book “A Chance in the World: An Orphan Boy, a Mysterious Past, and How He Found a Place Called Home” (Harper Collins). “So I felt like it was a story that I needed to get down for them. But I also needed to get it down for others in the same situation. I didn’t need to get it down for me as much. Because, while I do believe that you need to be healed, the healing for me came from building my own family.”

Currently the chief diversity officer and divisional vice-president for Walgreens Corporation, Pemberton, by all accounts, is living a very different life than the one initially envisioned for him. He has become recognized as one of the nation’s leaders on matters of diversity and inclusion. Pemberton’s story of triumph over adversity has lessons in it for anyone interested in the well-being of foster children, especially teachers, parents and counselors who have direct contact with them during their formidable years.

Pemberton was taken from his mother at one-and-a-half years old and placed in the foster care system. “A few days before Christmas,” he tells One Voice. “I never saw her again.”

He stresses that there are many wonderful families who adopt children every day, and many families who love and care for that child, for a lifetime. “But, unfortunately I didn’t find one of those families,” he says. “Or, one of those families didn’t find me.”
Pemberton says that he ended up with families who subjected him to “every kind of challenge, obstacle that you can imagine.”

He felt like a forgotten child. “There’s really no other way to describe it…” says Pemberton, who later found out that his mother battled drug addiction and died while he was in foster care. “I was completely forgotten about.”

He says that he spent much of his adolescence in fear of what was going to happen on a daily basis. Many times he was beat, cursed, and told that he was a mistake and no one wanted him. “They tell me that no one’s particularly concerned about me, and, everything I experienced on a daily basis affirmed that for me,” he says. “There were no teachers stepping in, no social workers trying to encourage you, and you have your foster parents telling you that you are the problem.”

He said that when he didn’t get love from his foster families, he sought love from social workers and teachers. “Anyone who I believed and hoped would see me as more than this broken boy,” he says. “But, none of them did.”

He admits that most children would simply accept their situation, give in to the notion that they somehow deserved to have a parentless life being physically and emotionally abused by heartless people. But he chose a different route. “My response to that was to fight back. Fight back through doing well in the classroom, I couldn’t fight them. I was too small to fight them physically. But I could fight them mentally with my love of reading and performance in the classroom. And, as a result it gave me self-esteem. It gave me vision. And, it gave me purpose.”

A relentless reader, Pemberton says that he has no idea the number of books he read as a child. But he does remember a woman, Mrs. Levin, who would bring him books that her children were no longer reading. She brought them in boxes to me,” he says. “She brought them, at least once a month.”

He would have to sneak away to read because his foster parents would yell at him if he was reading rather than doing chores around the house. “They were terribly violent people. And, they had these crazy rules, so I would hide under the stairs to read,” he says. “I loved mysteries. I read Alfred Hitchcock and Encyclopedia Brown, and Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys. Watership Down was my favorite. Lord of the Rings. They all brought me to different worlds that would move me on a daily basis from the realities of the experience that I was in. In my mind’s eye, I was a conqueror. I was a discoverer. I was an explorer. I was an astronaut. I was a detective. I was all these things that came to me through reading.”

None of his teachers knew of his situation. But since publishing his story, “I hear from them often, and with great apology because they suspected,” Pemberton says. “After reading the book, they realized that their suspicions were far worse than anything that they actually suspected was going on. And, so what I hear from them is, ‘How come I didn’t see?’ It’s very emotional for them, because I think they look back and see that they could have stopped it all. They could have stopped it. And, because they struggled to act, they didn’t.”

Pemberton says that it is important for child advocates to understand that these kids didn’t create their situation. “They didn’t ask for it. They just showed up. And they showed up through an avenue that has been wrought with peril and difficulty. And, the
The only question you can really have is, ‘What can I do to help provide you a pathway?’ At PTAs, what I would do is surround that child with a different vision. Because, that is what you need more than anything else. The situation and circumstance that they are either in or have come from, you can’t change that. But, you can provide a different vision, a different pathway.” On a more practical level, we can certainly become special advocates for foster children, or, if it’s within your heart and your means and your ability to adopt, then that is something that you can do as well."

Because of his good grades in school, Pemberton went on to receive a scholarship to attend Boston College. After going so long not talking about his past, he says that he now cherishes his role as an advocate for foster children. He says that PTAs play a vital role in helping foster children, especially youth that may be in less than desirable situations. "You can do something. You can act on your suspicions. You can bring a box of books. You can adopt a child. You can become a volunteer. I mean, there is so much that you can do," he says. "You are not powerless to do anything, particularly through organizations and communities around that child."

Pemberton says that he hears from foster children every day, thanking him for telling his story, and for helping them understand that they do not have to accept labels or their present condition. “They don’t focus, actually, on the tragedy of my story, because they have their own stories of abandonment and suffering," he says. “They want to know how you overcame it. What did you do to get through it?”

He said that, while it took some 20 years longer than it should, he is happy that his story is finally out there and his book is getting so much attention. “I wanted the story to get out there, not for the book sales. I’m an executive at a Fortune 50 company, so I’m doing okay,” he says. “But, it’s more for others who [read my story] say, ‘Okay, I’m going to survive this because he did. He’s telling me it’s possible.”
Schools Can Be a Place of Stability and Support for Students in Foster Care

By Kristin Kelly

For a child in foster care, whose lives are often filled with uncertainty, loss, and deprivation, school is a critical environment for safety, structure, and opportunity. Yet children in foster care face numerous unique barriers to education, such as living instability when children are initially removed from home and during their time in care. On average, a child in foster care experiences 2.8 living placements, which too often lead to school changes. When children change schools, they lose academic progress and leave behind peers and adults they’ve developed relationships with. Thus, school changes can worsen the instability children in foster care already feel in their home life, but now in their school environment as well.

Data shows that students in foster care have the lowest graduation rates, highest mobility rates, and highest drop-out rates, even compared to other at-risk students. But, small changes in how we work with children in foster care can make a significant difference. In addition to the child welfare system, the education system — school boards, administrators, teachers, other school staff, and PTA members — has an important role in supporting the school stability and success of children in foster care. Below are some examples on how schools and PTAs can provide support:

- **Learn more about the educational needs of children in foster care.** Working with your local school’s administration, your PTA can prepare and offer in-service training and resources to school staff about the child welfare system. To see short videos on this topic, see Endless Dreams, Becoming Visible, and It Get’s Awesome. For an example of training for educators, see Meeting the Educational Needs of Students in the Child Welfare System.

- **Identify students in foster care.** Local PTA units can encourage their schools to connect with local child welfare agencies and ask them to contact the school when a child is in foster care. Or, ask your school to use enrollment forms to determine child welfare involvement. Then, ensure that the school environment is “trauma informed” and prepared to support children with a history of abuse and neglect.

- **Help children in foster care stay in the same school, even when living placements change.** Work with the child welfare system to recruit more foster placements in your district. School PTAs can alert the teacher, staff, and parent community of the need for foster homes. Also, work with the child welfare agency to think of strategies to provide transportation for children to stay in the same school, even if they move to a new area.

- **Help children in foster care with immediate enrollment in the new school when changes occur.** Often, children in foster care experience delays in enrollment because of missing records or other documents. Streamline the process by allowing for immediate enrollment, and work on expediting required records. PTAs can provide supports to caretakers (i.e. relatives, foster parents) new to the school community to ensure a smooth transition for the child.

To learn more about how you can support the educational needs of children in the foster care system:

- Get Started and join the listserv at the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education
- Follow on Twitter at #FosterEdSuccess
- Learn about the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education

Kristin Kelly is a Senior Staff Attorney at the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law. She is a staff member of the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, a national technical assistance and training resource and clearinghouse on the educational needs of children in foster care.
Month of the Military Child

How PTAs Can Better Support Military Families

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus is centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues. This April, we turn our focus to military families and the unique challenges they face in supporting student success.

Based on National PTA’s Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore ways PTAs can welcome and support military families in the school community.

Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community

- Make it a point to welcome families new to the community and provide information about the school.
- Consider having a committee to assist new families, especially for those who transition midyear.
- When a family has to leave your school, ask how you can help ease the transition. Reach out to the new school and PTA to let them know that the family is coming.

Standard 2: Communicating Effectively

- Find ways to use technology (e.g., Skype, Facetime, email) to help deployed parents keep in touch with what is happening at school and participate in meetings if their schedules allow.
- Provide resources to help teachers communicate with families about sensitive issues, such as deployment.

Standard 3: Supporting Student Success

- Support the school administration in finding ways to include caregivers who may be deployed or working from another city in parent-teacher conferences.
- Make personal calls to families to ensure they understand the role they can play in supporting their students’ success at school.
- Educate teachers to increase their sensitivity during classroom discussions about issues such as war, casualties, and other aspects of military action.

Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child

- Host a “get to know you” event so families can meet key leaders from the school community.
- Provide schools and parents with their respective rights and responsibilities under the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.
About Military Children and Families

- Approximately 2 million military children have experienced a parental deployment since 2001.
- There are currently 1.2 million military children of active duty members worldwide.
- Nearly 80% of military children attend public schools throughout the United States.
- The average military family moves three times more often than their civilian counterpart.
- The repeated and extended separations and increased hazards of deployment compound stressors in military children's lives.
- One-third of school-age military children show psychosocial behaviors such as being anxious, worrying often, crying more frequently.
- The U.S. military consists of approximately 1.4 million active duty service members and 810,000 National Guard and Selected Reserve. Active duty military families live on or near military installations worldwide. National Guard and Reserve families might never live near a military installation and look within their community for educational services, friendship and support.

- A positive school environment, built upon caring relationships among all participants—students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents and community members—has been shown to impact not only academic performance but also positively influence emotions and behaviors of students.
- Supporting the military child takes a school-wide effort. School staff should also be educated on the academic and social-emotional challenges military children face.

(Sources: Best Practices: Building Blocks for Enhancing School Environment, The Psychosocial Effects of Deployment on Military Children)

Standard 5: Sharing Power

- Think about your leadership calendar. Do families who arrive midyear, or those who will only be at your school for a year or two, have equal opportunities to participate in school governance?
- Be sure your PTA board and committee meeting times and locations are flexible to accommodate military schedules.

Standard 6: Collaborating with the Community

- Partner with agencies in the community to share resources that might help military families.
- Use family-serving professionals and volunteers to conduct training for families to help them build resiliency skills.
Reflections of a Military Child: Inspiration from Abroad

By Erin Clark, National PTA Arts in Education Fellow

Two award winning works of student art from the National PTA Reflections Arts Program “The Magic of a Moment” captured the homecoming of military families. This magic moment is obviously a poignant one for some of today’s youth in the continental U.S. and beyond.

We had the chance to interview Benjamin Leese, one of our student artists, to get the story behind his heartfelt inspiration, entitled “Homecoming Dad.”

Do you have a military parent or family?
Yes, my dad is a Captain in the Air Force.

What inspired you to create artwork about a military homecoming?
The theme for the Reflections contest was the Magic of the Moment and there was no other moment I could think of that was more magical than the day my dad came home safely from Afghanistan after being gone for a year. It was tough hearing about all the things that were happening over there and never knowing if my dad was safe or not, so when he got off that plane and I could run up and hug him— that was just great!

How did you get involved with Reflections?
I never heard of Reflections until I came to Italy. This is the first time I was in a DOD (Department of Defense) school. I have been doing art since I could pick up a pencil and I love it. I think my art teacher realized I had some talent when I first was in her class, so when Ms. Lizee heard about the contest, she asked if I wanted to enter and I said, “Of course, who wouldn’t.”

What inspires you to be an artist?
It’s funny because this year’s theme for Reflections is Believe, Dream, and Inspire and so I had to really think about that question already. Inspiration is an amazing thing because it can come from almost anywhere or anything. Inspiration encourages many people to do anything, dream anything, and become anyone and their creativity is unlimited. For me as an artist, I am inspired by everything I see, whether it’s a dream, a vision, a historical landmark, a famous museum, other famous artists, or even the Superheroes in my comic books. I am always inspired. Believe me, being in Europe for three years and getting the chance to visit these famous places, there is lots to inspire me.

Do you have a mentor that encourages you to keep creating?
My dad, he has been my battery to my flashlight of creativity. He’s the one who pushes me. He gives me new ideas and has taught me everything I know. Without him I wouldn’t be winning any kind of contest, ever.

It is clear that Benjamin’s love and appreciation for his dad is unending. Though Benjamin lives in Italy, his patriotic spirit shines in his words and his art. We, here at National PTA, want to acknowledge and celebrate all military children like Benjamin. We want him and others to know that their courage and creativity are admirable and that PTA Reflections will continue to support them in their artistic endeavors.
How Military Families Can Engage With Their Children

By Kevin Weston

It’s hard to convey the true depth of military family engagement where children are concerned. Nevertheless, children are our most important mission because they are tomorrow’s leaders and decision makers. How they are shaped and influenced are through the forethoughts and compassion of dedicated folks, volunteers, educators and leaders of today.

The need for inherent kindness and efforts to bring provisions and comfort to military children is an ongoing endeavor. The month of April in support of “Month of the Military Child” should not be just a one-stop month and/or an annual recognition, but a continuous effort throughout the year. Let’s make no mistake, our military soldiers—Marine, Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard personnel—do not carry the massive burden for freedom sake alone. But family members such as spouses, extended family, and children who are left behind during deployments or are carried along with them through multiple transitions are all equally affected.

The hardships of day-to-day life for military children can be tough, but there are definitive ways to help meet their needs. Below are some possible programs to help engage our military children:

- Develop/start a support group of common interests and activities. In a support group, the children will provide comfort from day to day problems to each other. Members with the same issues can come together for sharing coping strategies, to feel more empowered and for a sense of community. The help may take the form of providing and evaluating relevant information, relating personal experiences, listening to and accepting others’ experiences, providing sympathetic understanding, and establishing social networks.

- Assist the incoming transitioning students into their new school and community, as well as help departing students prepare for entry into the next school. Sponsorship can be key to a military family’s successful move. This program can help create cohesion and a smoother transition into a new installation and/or academic community.

- Employ local civic organizations within the community to provide a cultural service to enhance the importance of our military children, children alike and education. Comprise the “Organizational Day” with all sorts of activities, local speakers, and educational programs.

- Ask local military personnel from a National Guard, the reserves and/or active duty units to talk about their jobs and responsibilities, read 15 minutes within a classroom, and/or lead a small exercise routine with kindergarten military children on a nearby post.

Many feel compelled to help, but invariably the “how to” question creeps in. Not knowing how to make a difference, we move on with our day, suppressing the disturbing images and waiting for the cycle to begin again. Nevertheless, always remember to lead by example. Giving servitude is better than receiving highlights and it strengthens the cause. Taking the first step unites us all.
PTA Advocacy for All Students: At Home and Overseas

By Kris Garst

This post comes from European PTA President, Kris Garst. She has lived overseas on for a total of five and a half years, and is currently living in Grafenwoehr, Germany, with her husband and three sons. She has been involved with the PTA in Europe since her oldest child started Kindergarten. Kris’s post seeks to bring an understanding of the challenges and successes of military students and families, as well as why it is important to support PTA efforts towards military families both overseas and in the states.

“Wait, there’s a PTA in EUROPE???”

During trips to National PTA events over the last few years, I’ve run into lots of people who are shocked to find out that PTA reaches as far as Europe! In fact, the European Congress of the National Parent Teacher Association has been advocating for the children in DoDEA (Department of Defense Education Activity) schools on U.S. military installations throughout Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, Bahrain and Turkey since 1958. We proudly serve the families of military members, government civilians, government contractors, and others who fall under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Defense throughout the European theater.

One Voice for the Military Child

As many of you already know, April is the Month of the Military Child, an opportunity to celebrate the amazing kids whose resilience and ability to adapt to the many changes of military life serve as an inspiration to us all. Through deployments, frequent moves, and separation from friends and family, they support their families and each other as they, along with their military parents, serve our nation. Over the past 56 years, the European PTA has been a strong voice for military children and families. We’ve advocated for important change in DoDEA schools, such as the presence of school nurses in every school, regardless of size, and the opportunity for our students to receive healthy, hot meals via the federal school lunch program. Beyond that, we work, from the local level and up, to strengthen the sense of community that is so important when military families are far from home and loved ones, supporting school programs for military kids, fostering family engagement, and even bringing little bits of home overseas via programs like the Scripps National Spelling Bee and the National PTA Reflections Program.

Not Your typical PTA…

While our overall mission is the same, European PTA Units are a little bit different than the typical PTA Unit in the States. We operate as official Private Organizations on the military bases and posts where our schools are located. This gives us permission to operate within the military community, but it also adds a whole new level of rules, regulations, and reporting! Advocating for our children overseas can also be a little bit different than the typical stateside experience. We don’t have a traditional local or state level of government, and our schools are funded by the U.S. Department of Defense and regulated by DoDEA Europe at both the ‘state’ and district levels. When action alerts come through from National PTA, our members must contact legislators based on their official State of Legal Residence in the U.S. (the state that is considered their residency for state income tax and voting purposes). Our members come from all over the United States and beyond, so this means that the EPTA’s response to those action calls can blanket the entire country!

We strive to impress the importance of taking the long view and of working toward the best possible situation for our children on both sides of the Atlantic.
Military children are some of the most resilient that there is. Growing up can be tough when there is always the possibility of living without a parent or caregiver due to deployment or having to uproot and move multiple times when duty stations change.

Logan Dean is one of the 1.2 million military children of active duty members worldwide. The 10-year-old’s father, Mike Dean is in the Army currently stationed away from home at Fort Bragg in N.C. Logan lives in Virginia with his mother Heather Dean, who works at National PTA.

Logan sat down with PTA’s One Voice to share his thoughts and experiences as a military child.

One Voice: What it is like having a dad who is in the military?

Logan: It’s like most of the time you can only see your dad once a week. A lot of times he’s out so you don’t have time for father/son bonding or anything like that so you kind of get lonely after a while and honestly it’s not very easy. It’s not really very easy having a dad that’s in the military in my opinion. The hardest part is dealing with all these feelings.

One Voice: What do you like most and least about your dad being in the military?

Logan: I think it’s a cool job. He brings me back a lot of souvenirs, and when he comes back in his uniform, he looks awesome. It surprises people at my school a lot and I just like him being in the military. What I hate about him being in the military is he’s so serious. He means a lot to me and so what I really hate the most is he’s not really like a typical dad. He commands a unit so when I’m at his Army base in Fort Bragg, he is always saying stuff about sectors and etc., and I don’t understand a word he’s saying.

One Voice: How many times, if any, have you had to change schools? What was that like?

Logan: I think I have had to move about four or five times. You’re able to meet new people that you really don’t know that well. But you have to leave really good friends behind like the best friend I ever had—Nathan. He was my friend in North Carolina, which is where I lived before I moved here and we used to do a lot together; playgrounds, movies, we used to play Xbox. We haven’t talked to him in 3 years. I really miss Nathan.

One Voice: What advice would you give a new friend who has a parent in the military?

Logan: Advice that I would give them would be if you sometimes feel lonely when you miss whoever left, just remember the good times you have and it sometimes feels like they’re right behind you, which I do a lot of times and it makes me feel really comfortable.
How PTAs Can Better Support Asian/Pacific Islander Families

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus is centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues. This May, we turn our focus to Asian American/Pacific Islander families and the unique challenges they face in supporting student success.

Based on National PTA’s Standards for Family-School Partnerships, let’s explore ways PTAs can welcome and support Asian American/Pacific Islander families in the school community.

**Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community**
- Establish a PTA welcoming committee responsible for identifying ways to make all families feel welcome.
- Greet other parents at school activities and events, sit with someone you don’t know and get to know them.
- Create welcome signs for the building that include all of the languages spoken by families.

**Standard 2: Communicating Effectively**
- Include a two-way communication mechanism, such as a question-and-answer section or mini survey, in each edition of your newsletter.
- Make sure all information is communicated in languages and formats to reach all parents.
- Sponsor events that allow educators and parents to interact socially, in addition to parent-teacher conferences and regular school meetings.

**Standard 3: Supporting Student Success**
- Link all events to student learning, including those activities focused on making all families feel welcome.
- Reinforce the school academic goals by hosting meetings that provide simple instructions on what parents do to help their children meet the standards.
- Provide workshops for parents and students on topics such as study skills, individual curriculum areas, and college and career planning.

**Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child**
- Host a Parents’ Café to discuss school issues. You will be surprised at the diversity within Asian/Pacific Islander families!
- Develop a buddy system to mentor new families and encourage them to participate.
- Involve parents in ongoing training on topics such as being an effective advocate, identifying and supporting learning styles, resolving difficulties, and fostering student achievement.
Standard 5: Sharing Power
- Make sure your PTA board reflects the demographics within your community.
- Invite an Asian/Pacific Islander leader to speak to parents on how they became a community leader.
- Provide all families with the opportunity to learn about and participate in the decision making process through forums and town halls. Make sure translation services are available.

Standard 6: Collaborating with the Community
- Partner with community members and community-based organizations that serve Asian/Pacific Islander families by recognizing, respecting, and addressing families’ needs and any class and cultural differences.
- Host a “meet community leaders” night and invite community leaders to parent orientations at the school.

Ways to Engage Asian American/Pacific Islander Families
- Office of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs
- Asia Society Education
- An Asian Pacific American Story (Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service)
- The Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center
- Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Resources
- Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
- National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
- National Federation of Filipino American Association
Advocating for Many as One: Every Child in Focus’ Month of the Asian American Child

By Jessica Wong Sumida

When entering a new school or applying for a job, the following voluntary ethnicity and race information is requested.

**RACIAL CATEGORY (Check as many as apply)**
- __ American Indian or Alaska Native
- __ Asian
- __ Black or African-American
- __ Hispanic or Latino
- __ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- __ White

Sometimes there are further definitions that accompany the choices such as Asian: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam, or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

In addition to the current definitions, the White House Initiative on Asian Americans (AA) and Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders (NHPI) is conducting outreach efforts to include all Pacific Islander Americans including Native Hawaiians, Chamoru, Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, Palauan, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, Yapese, Korean and others in the Micronesian, Melanesian and Polynesian Pacific Islander grouping.

If there are no definitions that accompany the ethnicity/race information or if you can only choose one category, then it can be very difficult to make a decision, as the diversity within the Asian American/Pacific Islander classification is robust. For example, there are at least 39 different Pacific Island languages spoken as a second language in the American home. This is indicative of the many different groups that are included in ‘Native Hawaii or Other Pacific Islander’ category that people may not realize when seeing that category listed on the race/ethnicity information. When looking at Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is comprised of Brunei Darussalam, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. North Asia includes countries such as Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan and Mongolia. Each country mentioned above has its own distinct language (some even more than one dialect), culture and history. In certain states and cities in the U.S., the various cultures are more distinct than in others. For example, there might be a “Japan town,” a “Korean town,” a “China town,” etc. But in other states, the cultures are much more blended. In Hawaii, for example, there isn’t such a distinction between the different cultures because they have blended together throughout Hawaii’s history to form their own unique Hawaiian culture.

Advocating for the needs of each individual group can be very difficult when they are all combined in one category, as the needs for the individual cultures are sometimes different when considering the needs of students. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, AAs and NHPIs are the fastest growing racial group in the US. Having one category can sometimes make it easier when advocating for the multiple groups that it is inclusive of, but simultaneously difficult for the specific needs of a particular group that is included.

When advocating in our respective states, or in Washington DC, we want to honor all groups in AA and NHPI by advocating for the best possible education for all students and the natural rights that all children are entitled to. While we do this we don’t want to forget...
about the various groups that we are representing. Although we may choose one or another two or three or more, on an application to best identify our own race or ethnicity, when we advocate we do so for all children because each category is representative of the many groups such as those mentioned above. Just as the PTA’s motto is ‘every child one voice’ we must advocate for every ethnicity that is represented by AA and NHPI although it may be difficult as each is distinct and unique. Nevertheless, the needs of all children remains the same, they are all entitled to a quality, inclusive education to reach their fullest potential.

To maximize our advocacy efforts, we must find ways to advocate for all AAs and NHPIs, while still respecting individual ethnicities and cultures. Some ways we can do this are to refer to cultural experts if there are questions about a particular topic that we’re not sure about. Diversity training in your local or state PTAs can be an effective way to education everyone on various cultures during which time members from various ethnic groups can share specifics on various concerns that they may be focusing on in their areas. To better education our leaders, site visits can be arranged for state and federal lawmakers so they can experience the various ethnic art, music, literature and language. To engage every family, translating legislative materials and PTA information into various languages relevant to the community and providing interpreters when needed is critical for raising awareness about important topics and ensuring that all voices are heard on every level. Finally, when there are many different groups as with AAs and NHPIs, forming a coalition and working collaboratively as a group is critical to effectively advocating for all with one voice.

While it may seem like a difficult task to honor all cultures while advocating with one voice, engaging families and seeking a quality education for all children is one of the hallmarks of the PTA and we must persevere through our advocacy efforts. As we speak to individuals and groups, or to our legislative members in our states or on the hill, we do so as a representative of our ethnicity, but also as a larger ethnic group advocating for the rights of all children.

Jessica Wong Sumida graduated with a MA in Psychology from Chapman University and a JD from Trinity Law School. She works for Hawaii Behavioral Health and has over 15 years of experience working with the DOE. She is also the executive director of the Autism Society of Hawaii, serves on the legislative committee of the Children’s Community Council, is the VP for Legislation of the Hawaii State Parent Teacher Student Association, and volunteers on the National PTA Resolutions Committee.
Learn More About Every Child in Focus

For resources and advocacy tools to help your school and community embrace diversity and inclusion and support the unique needs of every child, visit PTA.org/EveryChild.

To submit an idea for an Every Child in Focus event, visit PTA.org/ECIFevents.

To view a digital version of this book, visit ptaourchildren.org/everychildinfocus/20132014.

Every Child in Focus reinforces PTA’s mission to advocate for every child—with one voice—to ensure all children have the support they need to succeed and reach their full potential. With your help and support, more children, families and communities will be touched by the campaign in the 2014-2015 school year. Thank you for taking action and supporting the needs of every child!