

# The Principal and the PTA

Teamwork has become the model for success in business and industry. It is the key to success in education as well. Teamwork begins at the local school with a partnership between the principal and parents. When parents and the principal work together, they can lead the way to success for all students.

What does it mean for the PTA and the principal to work as partners? It means that each

understands his or her responsibilities, and the other's. It means setting goals and working cooperatively to achieve them. It means respecting each other's opinion, not expecting automatic approval from the other and not withdrawing support if opinions differ. It means reaching out to all parents and school staff to help our children and youth reach their potential.



## Two Roles of the Principal: School Official and Partner to Parents

### *Official duties*

*"The principal is the educational leader and spokesman for his or her school and the school community. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate of learning, the level of professionalism and the morale of the staff, and the degree of concern for students."*

-Statement by National PTA Board of Directors

Though the structure of schools differs from community to community, the main duties of the principal usually include these:

- Seeing that the school follows the curriculum guidelines adopted by the local school board or site-based management council. (A site-based management council is a group of people at the local school who have decision-making power for the school. Councils generally include the principal,

teacher representatives and parent representatives.)

- Helping determine teaching structure and the types of teaching techniques in the school.
- Being involved in the school's procedures for admission, registration, placement, evaluation, maintenance of students records, instruction of all students, and when appropriate, due process.
- Supervising all school personnel, including training and evaluation, hiring and firing.
- Overseeing the school building, its safety, maintenance, and security.
- Being accountable for budget expenditures. He or she may also prepare the building budget.
- Making sure that the school follows applicable local, state, and federal laws.

## How the Principal Builds A Partnership With Parents

It is up to the principal to make parent involvement a school priority. All major studies have shown that parent involvement in education is one of the keys to quality education. The principal can welcome parents, to the school by following some of these suggestions:

- Being available to the community. Scheduling meetings open to the public at different times and days, including evening and weekends. Inviting parents to set up private appointments to discuss concerns.

- Working to make parents feel welcome and comfortable in school – the first step toward parent involvement.
- Planning for and encouraging parent-teacher conferences. Showing parents and teachers how to use conferences to build parent-teacher-student teamwork. Making sure conferences are held at times when parents can come.
- Being sensitive to how a family's home life may affect how parents feel toward school. For example, a parent who is

struggling to keep a family housed and fed may have difficulty concentrating on a child's school problems.

- Being active in the PTA and encouraging teachers to participate, too.
- Helping the PTA keep its primary focus on education rather than fundraising. The principal and the PTA can work together to solve problems and set goals that will benefit students. Helping the PTA plan activities to accomplish specific goals. For example, encouraging the PTA board to plan events that promote children's well-being, home-school cooperation, and community betterment. These events often strengthen the school's business and community relationships as well.
- Working with the PTA to develop a program for training and using parent

and community volunteers, who can help staff enrich all areas of the school.

- Helping parents stay informed on current issues in education. Referring parents to helpful books, magazine articles, radio or TV programs. If there is a parent resource center in the school or local library, then suggesting materials to be included.
- Recognizing PTA volunteer's efforts. Appreciating the contributions of parents.
- Encouraging constructive discussions with parents that build confidence in the school's leadership and strengthen parent partnerships.



## 10 Partnering Tips for a Strong School Community

1. **A principal can host a "welcome" night** where all the parents are invited to the school and the principal gives an opening address, establishes basic expectations for the year, and invites parents to ask questions. Provide a form on which parents can write their contact information, best times to contact them, and preferred methods of communication. The principal can provide the same information to parents.
2. **Parents can establish PTAs that are inclusive** and representative of the school community's culture, family structures (single parent, blended, etc.), and abilities. (Invite the principal to become a member.) PTAs must value and embrace all parents and caregivers in order to implement successful school programs.
3. **Invite the principal to take part in developing the PTA's plan of work.** The principal can work with the PTA to set goals for their collaboration for the year.
4. **Make the principal-parent dialog visible.** Invite the principal to write an article for the PTA newsletter or listserv. Ask him or her to host coffees or "chats with the principal," inviting bilingual parents to translate as necessary.
5. **Network with community establishments** (hospitals, community centers, banks, libraries) to get free services or informational sessions for the school. Before moving ahead, a PTA might ask the principal for a list of priorities regarding services for the school and its families.
6. **Invite community groups and youth-serving organizations to school** shows, sporting events, and showcases of service-learning projects, thus publicizing what the students have accomplished. Ask these groups how you can work toward shared goals in support of the school.
7. **Carry out fundraisers tied to specific goals** relevant to the whole school community. Examples of such PTA fundraising goals might include campus

beautification, providing school playing fields, or underwriting classroom field trips.

8. **Nominate the school or principal for awards**, including parents in the recognition process. (Consider National PTA's Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification or the outstanding principal programs of the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.)
9. **Encourage two-way messaging.** Establish a principal-approved voice-mail system in which teachers regularly leave two-minute voice-mail messages

for parents about the classroom curriculum, and parents can leave messages for teachers as they strive to support their children's homework and study habits.

10. **Promote health and nutrition.** Form a task force of parents, the school principal, and pertinent school district staff to examine the school lunch program. (This refers to schools not participating in the federal school lunch program.) Look at the time allotted for lunch, the food options available; and the accessibility, pricing, and placement of healthy foods. Make recommendation for change if necessary.

## **The Two Roles of Parents: Child's First Educator and School Partner**

Parents share responsibility for their children's education. Involved parents are those who:

- Send to school a child who is ready and eager to learn, self-disciplined and prepared to accept the authority of school staff. Parents make sure the child understands and follows school rules.
- Supervise homework assignments as needed.
- Seek the advice of teachers to understand their children's growth and learning. Share information that will help school staff plan for their children.
- Learn about school programs, curriculum, regulations and

procedures, and actively support them.

- Show commitment to education by attending parent-teacher conferences, open houses, PTA meetings, student concerts, and other school programs whenever possible.
- Understand the work for the passage of school funding initiatives.
- Understand the need for professional development programs for teachers. Attend programs to learn about current issues and trends in education, when possible, to open the way for informed discussion, mutual respect and teamwork.



## **How the PTA and Parents Create a Partnership with the Principal**

More and more parents want to take an active role in their children's education. Being a member of the PTA gives them a way to work together in partnership with the principal. Here's how:

- Encourage the principal to speak openly of his or her goals and concerns.

- Present PTA concerns and issues to the principal. Develop a forum that allows for frank and open discussion.
- Focus on education and how to benefit students.
- Work with the principal or site-based management council to set goals. Plan

- programs that will help achieve these goals.
- Be alert to staff and community talents and resources, use them for the benefit of the entire school.

- Help the principal promote fair discipline for all children. Volunteer to help write a discipline code for the school if one does not exist.

## **Principal and PTA President Working Together**

The principal and the PTA president represent two important groups on the school: staff and parents. Here are some suggestions for nurturing this important partnership.

- Meet weekly at an agreed upon time. Discuss issues. Review plans for events. Keep each other informed.
- Work out problems or misunderstandings in a direct, honest

way. Keep an open mind. Listen to each other.

- When working with parents and community, be positive and enthusiastic about our school.
- Develop a win-win attitude. Celebrate each other's accomplishments.

**A working partnership between the principal and the PTA, dedicated to the welfare of all children and youth, can strengthen family life and improve education for all of our children.**

-Adapted from National PTA



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