

How to Share the Value of PTA

“At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child’s success is the positive involvement of parents.”

– Former Arizona Gov. Jane Dee Hull

By Krista Back

While virtually everyone agrees that it is important for parents and caregivers to get involved in their children’s education—in fact, when asked, most parents will gush about how much they care about the education of their child—there is a disconnect when it comes to PTA. Parents, especially younger ones, have trouble understanding what belonging to PTA can do for them and their child. As a PTA leader, your job is to inform these parents that your local PTA fills the gap between wanting to be involved and finding the time to do so.

Bridging the gaps about PTA

As a PTA leader, you know that your local unit, state PTA, and National PTA® work to make being involved easier and to give you more tools and knowledge to assist in your child’s education. Unfortunately, there are misconceptions about even being involved at school. In some cultures, parents do not feel they have the right to question or partner with authorities such as teachers and principals, or they may feel awkward and uncomfortable speaking up on behalf of their child. Other parents lack an understanding of the benefits of being a part of PTA, and may see our organization as one that requires them to volunteer, fundraise, and contribute money they may not have. In an ideal world, everyone would have time to volunteer, attend every event involving their child, and have enough money to contribute to PTA’s efforts; the reality is that times are hard, and life is often busy and chaotic.

Nonetheless, regardless of the issues or tasks facing parents, some of the most rewarding and memorable things not only in their lives, but also in the lives of their children come when they set aside time to participate at school.

“Parents are a child’s first educator, and with the ever-increasing pressure placed on classroom teachers for students to achieve, the PTA plays a vital role in offering the opportunity for parents to assist teachers in the most valuable of endeavors—the education of their child.”

– Katy Goldsmith, Yellow Branch Elementary School 4th-grade teacher, Campbell County, Virginia

It is important to suggest to parents that the sooner they establish a routine of involvement in their young child’s life, the more of an impact it will have on their learning and education going forward.

Tell your own story

One of the most powerful ways you can communicate the value of PTA to potential and current members is by telling your own story. Here is my own:

Growing up in a small, rural town in the “thumb” region of Michigan, I experienced firsthand that for my parents, being involved was the name of the game. My parents frequently chose to give up some of their favorite television shows, going out for the evening, and computer time to be more involved in the day-to-day lives of me and my siblings. I can attest to the fact that my parents were more involved than any of my friend’s parents, and even at a young age, I knew it, enjoyed it, and was thankful. There were instances, I am sure, that were both frustrating and extremely rewarding for them to be involved in my education, but regardless of the obstacles set before them, they recognized early on the importance of stepping in and taking an active role in my schooling. Both of my parents arranged their schedules to attend every open house or teacher conference, including, and especially, every PTA meeting or event there was at my school; amazingly, they always went together—never once did they split up or tag-team these events.

“The importance that parents play in their child’s education should never be overlooked or taken for granted. Parents are at the forefront of educational reform, and they have the potential to serve as their child’s biggest motivator for success in school. It is imperative that parents participate in the support and implementation of education, and the PTA provides a viable avenue for parents to become actively involved in their child’s present and future successes.”

– Julie Bloomfield, Appomattox High School English teacher, Appomattox, Virginia

Talking Points for Recruiting Members

When approaching potential PTA members, relate a personal story like the one in this article and use one or more of these talking points in making your pitch:

- You will find a support system of parents who know what it is like to rearrange schedules, plan carpools, make a dollar stretch a little farther, and worry about how well their child is doing in school, and parents who are willing to help you.
- The more support you have, the easier working with your child's principal, teachers, and school community will be. PTA encompasses a large, nationwide network of people working toward the same goals, and who are happy to share their ideas and experiences no matter where you and they are located.
- PTA offers you access to programs and resources that may be lacking in your school, such as the Reflections art program.
- Because National PTA® has been around for well over 100 years, it has a long and proven structure for serving students, parents, and teachers, as well as an impressive track record of advocating for education and child welfare improvements.
- PTA is the only parent organization with national, state and local governing bodies. This structure means that whether you are interested in national school nutrition programs or getting a stop sign installed near your school, you can call on PTA to help you make your voice heard.

Because my mother worked during the day, my dad took it upon himself to shift around his schedule to go with me on every single field trip. I am fairly certain he was the only father in attendance, and when he could have been doing other things, he chose to make the trips fun and engaging for me and my friends. He participated in our silly games on the bus ride, and then walked through the various exhibits, fairs, and museums with us. One particular instance stands out in my memory: while we walked through the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum, my dad took the time to explain things that he had actually lived through, which to all of us just seemed to be ancient history. Not only was I enthralled by my dad's description of events that took place in history, every one of my classmates was as well. We followed my dad around the entire museum as he dynamically brought to life boring displays, such as the Watergate exhibit that included a glass door, duct tape, a filing cabinet, and a lot of boring text about an old president, Richard Nixon.

Today, many years after high school, I still treasure an almost endless number of funny, serious, and, most of all, loving experiences with my parents, and appreciate the sacrifices they made to be an intentional part of my education. I believe that our local PTA helped make my cherished memories possible by helping to facilitate a community of education by developing resources and support for my parents.

So, the question that begs to be asked is, at the very basic level, what honestly makes the difference in a child's education? The answer is you, the parent sitting next to you, and the parent sitting next to them. PTA is about connecting to resources and people who care about children and their education, so reaching out to other parents is essential for building community. Together you and other parents can and do make substantial differences in children's education, not only on a personal level, but on a much broader scale across the country. The involvement of PTA members means every child truly benefits from one unified voice. **OC**

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What's New on PTA.org

15 Effective Strategies to Increase the High School Graduation Rate
Advice from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network that has a proven positive impact on the national dropout rate. Learn how you and your PTA can help. [\[Go to PTA.org/ourchildren\]](http://PTA.org/ourchildren)

Six Warning Signs That Your Child is Being Bullied
As part of the January PTA Parent e-newsletter, Dr. Ted Zeff, a practicing psychologist and author, provides six warning signs for parents that their child might be the victim of bullying. [\[Go to PTA.org/4427.htm\]](http://PTA.org/4427.htm)

PTA Fundraising Marketplace
The online PTA Fundraising Marketplace directory will assist you in finding vendors and services to help make your PTA fundraiser a success. Visit these companies for more information. For more fundraising information, go to the PTA fundraising resources page on PTA.org/fundraising. [\[Go to PTA.org/3095.htm\]](http://PTA.org/3095.htm)