

# Franklin Elementary PTA's "Sweet Success"

By Jennifer Freemon

In 2009, Franklin Elementary PTA, in Glendale, California, had a membership of 375. This year, we are at 721 and counting. Our total enrollment this year is at 523, so we are well over 100 percent membership for every family with a student at our school. To understand our success, one must first get a brief primer on our school.

Just a few short years ago, Franklin was in danger of closing its doors because enrollment was so low. The school district decided to put into place a series of language immersion programs at the site. We currently house Spanish, Italian, and German immersion programs. These programs have boosted our enrollment and turned the school around. The PTA board jumped at the opportunity to welcome new parents into the school while continuing to value the families who were already well-established at the school.

## Connect with families

The number-one reason for our membership success is our commitment to connecting with every single family at the school. Families who feel connected join PTA—period. It is not enough to create flyers, send e-mails, and hope your message gets read. PTA needs to be a positive, uniting presence on campus. Everyone must feel they are a welcome addition to the PTA family, regardless of their ability to volunteer, what language they speak at home, finances, or any other circumstances.



At Franklin, we reach out not only through standard school communication pieces, but also by focusing on one-to-one contact. Since our PTA board is composed of a cross-section of the school, we make sure that all our board members are reaching out so that we connect with as many families as possible.

Before the school year starts, we hold a welcome-back barbecue and school information fair at orientation. These events allow members and leaders of our PTA and other parent groups to meet new families before the hectic first days of school begin. We also put in place programming that connects the community to the school. Whether it be a father/daughter dance, a parent workshop on traffic safety, or working with our neighbors on community issues, we make sure our PTA is relevant to the needs of our school community.

## Visibility

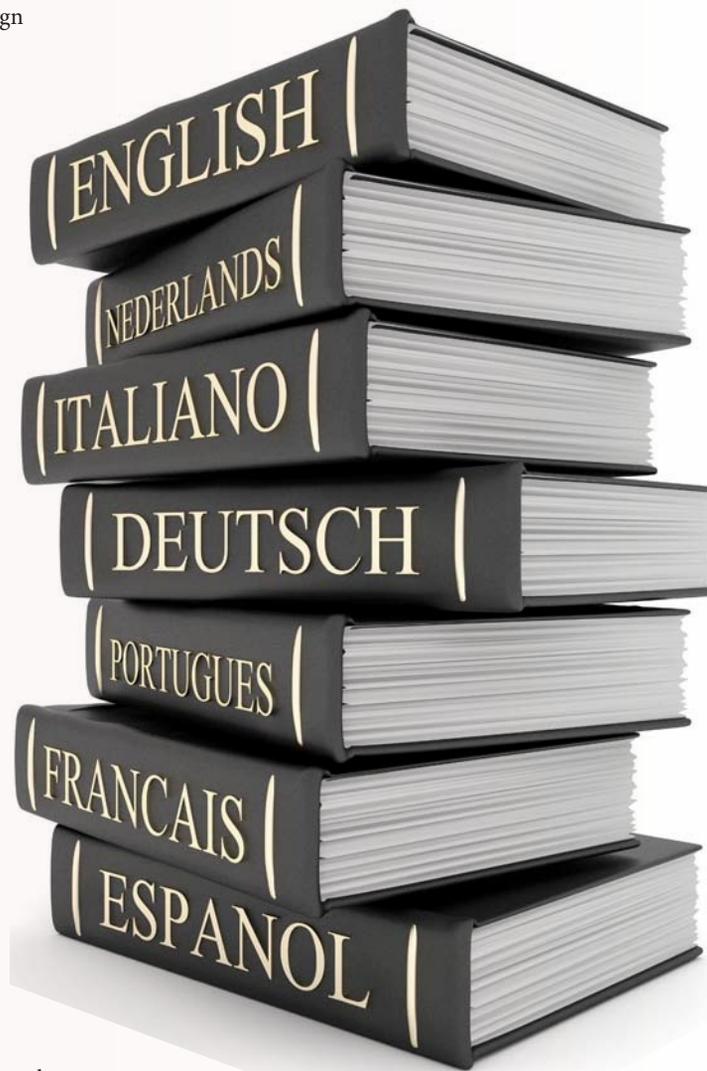
The second key to our membership numbers is visibility. At the beginning of the year we, along with other parent groups at the school, present a Volunteer Fair at Back to School Night. As parents come into the school, they are greeted with a set of booths that highlight various school programs filled with display boards, samples, photos, and people to answer questions. As parents walk through, they are able to see what Franklin PTA does throughout the year. Not only do we get the word out when we need help, but we also get the word out when we can help our families, as well as when we are in the school doing student-based projects. We also make sure our PTA name is visible at all of these activities through flyers, posters, and name badges.

## Fun membership campaign

Never underestimate the value of a great fall membership campaign. Families need to know it is time to join PTA and be reminded of all the great reasons they are a part of the organization. Here, it is important to stay positive and focus on how PTA is a benefit to each family. This is where we have changed our own expectations. We expect that we will reach 100 percent membership and encourage our families to meet that expectation. Our membership drive is now focused on how quickly we can reach that mark, rather than just simply reaching it. We send out frequent updates on how close we are to our targets, and we regularly post the progress of each class in reaching our goal.

The theme for this year's campaign was "Sweet Success." Each class had a large ice cream cone posted in the common hallway. As they turned in memberships, scoops of ice cream were added, ending with whipped cream and a cherry on top. Our membership chair diligently posted new scoops nearly daily at the height of the fall campaign.

While students watched their scoops rise and rise, parents got regular updates via e-mail and through our class rosters. Parents started a friendly competition amongst themselves, posting to other classes how many memberships they had turned in and challenging other classes to meet their numbers. At the morning drop-off, we heard parents calling each other out and setting new challenges. Friendly competition does wonders! It was a duty of the PTA board members to monitor the classes and be sure the competition stayed light-hearted and fun and that no one was scolded into joining. We found that we now need to make room above 100 percent on our graphs and visuals, since we have classes that are reaching 200–300 percent membership levels.



## Inclusion

We are a school that could easily divide into four separate entities along language-program lines—English, Italian, Spanish, and German. Any school has its factions, and the challenge is how to help the various groups understand how supporting the whole is better for all. Our PTA has made a concentrated effort to keep the school unified and lead by example. At Franklin, we make sure our board has members from all of our groups. We also make it a priority to do programming that will touch all of our groups in a way that unifies, not divides. This strategy sounds like a no-brainer, but it is easy to fall into a rut. If

we were not intentional about unification, our PTA could easily be “the Spanish thing” or “the German thing” rather than a schoolwide resource.

We also strive to be appreciative and positive with everyone. We know a small group of parents will do much of the volunteering. We focus on breaking down our volunteer opportunities into smaller pieces so that more parents can be involved. Rather than asking a parent to do morning car valet duty for a month at a time, we set up a system where they can volunteer for the year, a month, a week, or even a day. Parents need to feel they are valued, regardless of how much they can participate. When they feel needed and valued, we have found that they join.

We are proud of our success at Franklin and look forward to continuing to grow our membership. Keeping the PTA a positive, inclusive force at the school is the key to our “sweet success.” 

*Jennifer Freemon is president, Franklin Elementary PTA, Glendale, California.*