

Our Children

National
PTA

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The National PTA® Magazine

**Financing
College:
4 Secrets
Every Parent
Should Know**

**Male
Engagement
in Education:
How Important
is it?**



Celebrate Teachers

National PTA Honors Four National Teacher of the Year Finalists

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References: 1. Poland, GA. Prevention of meningococcal disease: current use of polysaccharide and conjugate vaccines. *Clin Infect Dis*. 2010;50(suppl 2):S45-S53. 2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Meningococcal disease. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. <http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/index.html>. Updated April 1, 2014. Accessed October 16, 2014. 3. Tully J, Viner RM, Coen PG, et al. Risk and protective factors for meningococcal disease in adolescents: matched cohort study. *BMJ*. 2006;332(7539):445-450. 4. Cohn AC, MacNeil JR, Harrison LH, et al. Changes in *Neisseria meningitidis* disease epidemiology in the United States, 1998-2007: implications for prevention of meningococcal disease. *Clin Infect Dis*. 2010;50(2):184-191. 5. Thompson MJ, Ninis N, Perera R, et al. Clinical recognition of meningococcal disease in children and adolescents. *Lancet*. 2006;367(9508):397-403.



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Teacher Appreciation

One of the greatest gifts to the world is teachers. Here, at National PTA, they not only represent the middle letter of our association, but they also contribute to our constant efforts to make sure our children are prepared for life and have the brightest future possible.

Each year, National PTA takes part in recognizing a group of teachers that stand out among the best of the best. I am honored to serve on the board that selects the National Teacher of the Year. It is a wonderful experience. The teachers that I have had the opportunity to interview during the last two years have shown me firsthand the exceptional teaching professionals that we have working with our children every day and provided me with a better understanding of the influence that they have on each child's life. Listening to the best practices they bring to the table, and the passion in their voices for children and their craft, is heart-warming. They truly are the cream of the crop.

The finalists for National Teacher of the Year stand out because they go the extra mile to show their love for every student that steps foot in their classroom and for the love of the teaching profession. They have overcome some challenging hurdles in their own lives, yet still answered the call to teach in ways that exceed the status quo. They also work continuously to master the teaching craft and make adjustments

to meet the specific needs of their students. They understand their multifaceted role and understand that they are not only teachers, but, in some cases, surrogate parents, social workers, psychologists, counselors, and many other unspoken roles that come with the territory. The candidates' commitment to supporting success for every student within their reach and passion for their craft is both inspirational and impressive.

Teaching is one of the most powerful professions in the world. Every professional has had to learn from a teacher. They make great sacrifices every day, sometimes taking time away from their own family and personal lives to meet the needs of their students. In short, they go out of their way to ensure a student reaches their highest potential.

With the conclusion of another successful school year, we want to thank our educators for their continuous commitment to cultivating the young minds of our children.

In addition to celebrating teachers, this issue of *Our Children* also features an article about the ways that we can better accommodate foster children in our communities, as well as how PTA works to meet the needs of the children of military service members both here and abroad. If you have a college bound student, this issue includes a few secrets to help make the transition easier.

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Teachers and students watch as Mr. Brown gets all “goood” up.
Mr. Brown playing around in the dunk tank.
(Upper Right)
Being a good sport at the Cream the Principal event in 2012. (Lower Right)

The Impact of **School Administration** and **Staff Collaboration** on the Success of **PTA**

By Linda Johnson

During the first week of May, schools across the country will be celebrating Teacher Appreciation Week to thank teachers and staff for their contributions to their schools and communities that make family-school partnerships possible. PTA leaders will be celebrating the teachers, staff, and principals who have pitched in to help with membership drives, family engagement events and all things PTA that have helped make this year a big success.

Teachers are wonderful partners with PTA, after all, they are the middle name of our Parent Teacher Association. Teachers provide insight and feedback to the PTA and serve on boards as leaders, committee members or grade level liaisons. They assist with planning and coordinating family engagement events, promote PTA membership and activities or join as members to show their support. Teachers spend countless hours after school helping PTAs with carnivals, family nights, garage sales, and other activities that support student and family success. PTA leaders like Heather Garcia at Fernley Elementary PTA and Bernadette Howell at Silverland Middle School PTA are excited and grateful each year when they achieve 100% teacher and staff membership participation. Collaboration and mutual support leads to some great results.

Passionate Meeker Elementary teachers, staff and PTA leaders partnered to host a “Freaky Friday” event during “Take Your Family to School Week” in 2014. Families and students switched places for a night to help give families insight into their child’s day at school. Families were served hot lunch by the actual lunch ladies, ran drills with the PE teacher, practiced scales with the music teacher, took actual Accelerated Reader tests and completed a sample Smarter Balanced Assessment. Collaboration and great family engagement help Meeker PTA get 100% teacher and family membership participation.

Don’t forget that principals are also great supporters and advocates for PTA. They attend PTA meetings and give briefings about upcoming events and issues important to families. They collaborate and coordinate with PTA leaders on the calendar of assemblies, field trips, family events and fundraising. Principal Robert Soloman at Lamping Elementary sent home a letter to all of his school’s families in January explaining the mission and purpose of PTA, Lamping PTA achievements and all the ways they support the school, staff, students and families. He encouraged families to join PTA to help support the great work being done at their school and 75 more families joined their PTA over the next month.

Sometimes principals put themselves on the line physically to support their PTA. Pictures on school websites and across social media show principals being taped to walls, dressing like superheroes, or getting pied in the face to support student activities or PTA membership and fundraising drives. Principal Chris Brown at Uinta Meadows Elementary volunteered to be the prize for this year’s PTA fundraiser. He let 25 students dunk him in a water tank and eight students got to pour goo on his head to the delight of all of the students and teachers. Bonner Elementary Principal Paul Cantania had to don goggles when he volunteered to let students “Cream the Principal.”



School district superintendents are also supporting PTAs. They encourage parent groups in their districts to join PTA because they value the training, oversight and family engagement programs available to help students, families and schools be successful. Dr. Hirase, superintendent of Murray School District, serves on the board of Utah PTA. He provides training and insight to state PTA leaders to help build successful family-school partnerships. He created a “membership” video to encourage other superintendents to

join PTA. He provides incentives to schools in his district when 100% of their staff join PTA and even puts himself up for auction to provide his services as “substitute teacher” for half a day and brings his snakes into the class to share with students.

Collaboration at all levels of education between schools, PTAs and families leads to successful students and successful schools.

Linda Johnson is a national service representative for National PTA.

From **EMLC Attendee** to **PTA State President**

By Anna King

The first Emerging Minority Leaders Conference (EMLC) I attended was October 31, 2008 in Oakbrook, Ill. That conference set me on a course to play an intricate role in PTA in my school, my community, and my state.

My husband and I joined our children's elementary school PTA to support and be involved in the classrooms. It was 11 years before I became president of the Frederick A. Douglass Mid-High School PTSA in Oklahoma City, Okla., and had my eyes opened to a whole different world of PTA. That is when we noticed the deterioration of parent involvement. Talking to parents, community leaders, alumni and anyone who would listen became a driving force of our PTSA.

When I delivered the membership dues to the state office, I saw all the photos of past state presidents, dating back to 1922 and one picture really resonated with me. There was this one picture that I felt I could connect with. It was a photo of Liz Parker, the first African American president of Oklahoma PTA. It was very exciting to find out that PTA was an association that spoke up for children but also disappointing that it took 11 years to hear any information about the work of PTA.

Over the next year, I learned all I could about PTA, became a council president, and attended my first National PTA convention where I was blessed to hear Dr. Maya Angelou share a narrative of her childhood, educational upbringing, and the impact of PTA. Her powerful words caressed my soul and re-energized my passion for PTA. Being one of just four minority members of the state board, I came home determined to engage parents and the communities around us.

At that first EMLC, there were many wonderful workshops, engaging group experiences, and lots of collaboration from like-minded, minority leaders from across the country. It was an amazing experience to share and work with other leaders facing the same obstacles I was at home. The spectrum of information displayed and the sincerity of all who shared their ideas about diversity and inclusiveness was an incredibly moving and humbling experience.

I came home feeling extremely empowered and rejuvenated about what could happen with PTA. There was a new focus and determination. The

inspiration, training, mentors, and many friendships I received eventually gave me the courage to become the state president of Oklahoma PTA. Some of these friendships included Sherry Reimer, OKPTA executive director who always pushed me to learn the history of PTA; Terri Silver, a former state PTA president who always reminded me to think of the bigger picture; Charmaine Brown and Dennescia Robinson, dear friends who always had encouraging words; and, my family—the reason I do everything in life.

Finally, I was honored to have my friend and mentor Liz Parker install me as state president in 2011. On that day she handed me a rose and said, “Being able to interact with a diverse population is simply a microcosm of our daily roles. It allows us to have a continuous reminder of our purpose and keeps us on our toes for the children and families we serve.” I have never forgotten those words, from the lady whose picture captured my heart in 2007.

Anna King is the immediate past president of the Oklahoma PTA.





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REAL MEN NEEDED

Understanding the
importance of
male engagement
in education

By Michael Knowles



Studies show that students perform better in school when parents or caregivers are actively involved in the education of their children. Men and women think differently and bring different perspectives and skills to school and PTA activities, but oftentimes, the women dominate in this area—until now.

We tackled this issue from the grassroots perspective in an interview with Anthony King, who is responsible for creating a unique PTA of its own kind, the Detroit Area Dads PTA.

OUR CHILDREN: What motivated you to start a male-centered PTA?

KING: I felt that there was a need for an organization to reach out to the men. I wanted to encourage dads. You always hear about the women, but you don't hear or see many dads around school. I became a part of PTA because of my daughter when she was at Vernor Elementary School here in Detroit. I just started volunteering and wanted to make sure the kids got to school in the morning. It just evolved. I got more involved in the school and the PTA. I started as the sergeant at arms and when the PTA president's child graduated, I somehow ended up as PTA president.

My background included not having my dad in my life as a kid. In fact, I did not meet my dad until I was 15. I had strong uncles and cousins who watched out for me. I was very thankful. When I moved to Detroit in 1966, the guys I connected with had fathers that were in their lives. They were the ones who put me in check. I tell young fathers today that it doesn't matter if you are living in the home or not. It still has an impact in your child's life.

I have been involved with PTA as a member for close to 10 years now. I served as the PTA president at Vernor Elementary School and vice-president of the Detroit Council PTA. I will continue to try and make a difference in the relationships of fathers and their children.

OUR CHILDREN: How did you get started with forming a Dads PTA?

KING: In 2011, I attended a parent's forum of workshops and activities at Central High School in Detroit. I had a chance to meet Shirley Jones, regional director for the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). In our conversation, I said that I believed there was a need to address issues concerning men who were raising their children alone and other issues concerning men being involved in their child's education and social growth.

Ms. Jones loved the idea and suggested that I put something together that she could present to the DOE. I then talked with some friends who had the same passion that I have about empowering dads to be better fathers. Carl Baxter, George Camacho, Marcus Cummings, Debbie Ector and I drafted a letter that I sent to Ms. Jones and she asked that we proceed with planning an event focusing on dads. It was out of this energy that we started the Detroit Area Dads PTA. We wanted an organization that serves all dads in the community, regardless of where their children went to school.



We contacted the Michigan PTA. Debbie Ector was an officer there and guided us through the state forms and chartering procedures. I called the IRS to become a 501c organization and we got to work.

OUR CHILDREN: What are some of the activities of the Dads PTA?

KING: The first thing we did was hold a roundtable discussion at Pershing High School with about 50 men in attendance. We had a panel of men and table discussions to ask the men what issues they were dealing with in Detroit. From this event we started making plans for something bigger.

We later partnered with the U.S. Department of Education, Detroit Public Schools, the Education Achievement Authority (EAA) and State Representative Thomas Stallworth's office, along with others. We held a "Dads to Dads" forum on June 7, 2014, at Detroit Collegiate Preparatory High School at Northwestern. We had about 400-425 participants attend our workshops. There were free health screenings, signing up for skill trades apprenticeship training, and legal advice for fathers and programs encouraging dads to become more engaged with their children and education. It was also attended by the current National PTA President Otha Thornton, Jr. The event was such a huge success that we hope to add partners to do the same type of forum.

We have held other events, including a Thanksgiving turkey dinner giveaway for single fathers that included a \$100 gift card giveaway for one lucky father. We hope to do this every year.

OUR CHILDREN: Where and when do you meet?

KING: We meet monthly and we don't meet in the same place. We have met at a UAW Union Hall, at churches, the JAVA house community center, Brightmore community center, wherever available. Our communications and media person finds a spot for us to meet and helps with the notifications and invitations.

OUR CHILDREN: If someone wants to know more about the Dads PTA, how can they reach you?

KING: You can reach us at DetroitAreaDadsPTA@yahoo.com or DetroitAreaDadsPTA@gmail.com.



5 Ways To Keep the Fun in Summer

By Shaina Croom

Summer is fast approaching. That means vacations, cookouts, summer outings and limitless opportunities for fun in the sun. But on those days when you run out of ideas to keep the kids busy or need a new activity to add to the mix, here a few ideas that should do the trick. These five activities are fun, free and things you can do with children of all ages. Some of them do not even require leaving the house. Make this year memorable by enjoying these awesome family-friendly summertime activities!

Flashlight Tag

There's something awesome about playing outside at dusk on a warm summer evening. Make it even more memorable with a game of flashlight tag. Played at dark, this game combines tag with hide-and-seek. The person who is "it" counts to ten (or higher) while others hide. The person who is "it" must then find the other players and call their name while shining a light on them to tag them.

Road Trip Fun

Every now and then there is the good old-fashioned road trip. When the kids are not plugged into some form of electronics, try this to help the time speed by. Count the scenery. Have your child keep a running count of items outside the car window, such as brown cows, red cars, or restaurant billboards, and tally the findings. Older children (7 and up) can sharpen their math skills by adding up license-plate numbers or mile markers. For the competitors: The first one to reach a particular number wins.

Backyard Camping

There's no need to send your children to overnight camps to get a taste of the great outdoors. You can do it right at home! Set up a tent in your backyard, roll out the sleeping bags and melt marshmallows in the microwave for yummy S'mores. And the best thing: If storm clouds or frightened children threaten your campout, you can run inside to your own home.

Scavenger Hunt

Set up a race by sending your child or a group of children hunting for simple treasures in your house, yard or neighborhood. Because it takes a little effort to come up with clues you can enlist the help of an older sibling or neighbor. Give them a reasonable time frame to find as many treasures as they can. For the competitors: The one who finds the most treasures in the allotted time or who finds them all first wins.

Small Business

There has never been a better time to teach your children the value of a dollar, so why not start a small business? The traditional lemonade stand or family yard sale remain great choices. But let your children's interests and abilities guide their business endeavor. It could be a dog wash or walking service, a car wash, bake sale or lawn mowing service.



One of the many smiling faces meeting Memory Mission volunteers at the school.

PTA members on the 2015 Lifetouch Memory Mission, from left, Enrique Escallon, Sergio Chavez, Wendy Walters-Dean, Leslie Cushman and James Accomando.

Lifetouch Memory Mission: Building Schools, Changing Lives

When Wendy Walters-Dean, elections chair for National PTA, learned that she had been selected to join the 2015 Lifetouch Memory Mission, she knew “this could be the beginning of a new chapter in so many lives.” But, she says now, she didn’t fully realize how many.

Since 2000, Lifetouch, the photography company, has been sending volunteer teams to destinations throughout the United States and around the world, where they spend a week providing intensive, hands-on humanitarian aid to underprivileged communities.

Since making that initial commitment to Constanza, Lifetouch Memory Mission has sponsored four highly productive trips to the school site. By the time the 2015 team was on its way to the Dominican Republic this past January; previous teams had already completed a two-story elementary school building for the Cecaini School that is now attended by more than 200 children. They had also begun construction of an adjoining two-story vocational technical school.

“There were 47 people on our team, including four of us from PTA,” says Walters-Dean. “Our job was to complete the second floor of the vocational school,” she recalls. “When we got there, the building just looked like an empty frame. There were no interior walls, nothing. To get the cement block to the second floor, we formed a human chain, pass-

ing blocks, one-by-one. We created walls, we framed-out windows and doors.” She says that, while she worked, she kept picturing the children who would learn there. “The pastor had told us what their intentions were for the vocational school,” she explains. “There will be job preparation for everyone in the community. Some will go on to college. Others will learn vocational skills to support their families. The vocational school will have a hair salon, a barbershop and a kitchen/restaurant where kids learn to cook, bake bread or wait tables. The food they cook will be served for school lunches.”

Thanks to discussions initiated by National PTA President Otha Thornton, who served on the 2014 Memory Mission, a PTA has been established in Constanza. Walters-Dean hopes to be part of that ongoing effort. “But there is more than that,” she adds. “As I think about my time in Constanza, I think about how we walked up to a shell of a building and one week later, it was a school. We did that!” she says. “I want to remain part of this. I want to go back and do more, hopefully, bringing my family with me,” she adds. “I knew that this trip would bring about change in people’s lives,” she says, choking up for just a moment. “Now I realize that one of those people is me.”



PTA: Serving Those Who Serve

By Kathleen Brough

National PTA has a long history of working to advocate for military children and support families in transition. Currently, there are more than two million military children living in the United States and overseas. On average, military children move six to nine times in the course of their education and often experience long periods of separation from their service member parent. Even as our current federal policy moves the military forces toward home, families can still be faced with tumultuous change that extends the strength of their resiliency. Yet, not all military families are the same. Some families may live on or close to military bases. Some may reside on a base in Italy or Korea. And some children may be the only kid at school who knows what a deployment is. PTA involvement provides not only the opportunity for parents to be involved in their children's school; it provides community structure and stability during transitions. It is imperative that PTA continue to embrace military families in our communities of advocacy and support.

National PTA and Department of Defense

Education Activity (DoDEA) have worked together to support military children for over 50 years. DoDEA is a school district that serves military children at schools on installations all over the world and in the United States. In 1962, the European PTA (EPTA) held a conference in Paris where they were given a special presentation at the Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers in Europe. One of their first resolutions was to secure federal grant funds for the education of military children. The European PTA helped set a legislative precedence. Today, legislation is in place that provides federal funds to both DoDEA and all public schools that support a large population of military students. DoDEA comments, "The European PTA is a most valuable asset to our DoD school system. Local PTA and PTSA units have developed programs that have fostered greater involvement in their children's education. EPTA has awarded meaningful recognition for outstanding achievement to many of our students, educators, administrators, and parent volunteers. Among their greatest successes, EPTA has worked to promote

school and bus safety, enrich the curriculum, and advocate on behalf of our children to senior military leaders and the United States Congress." Today, PTA still resides with the



Moderator of main panel discussion, Spring Conference, European Congress of American Parents and Teachers, at Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers in Europe, 15-17 April 1962. Left to right: Dr. Charles Brady, Superintendent of US Army Schools, Naples, Italy; Miss Evelyn Barrett, Principal US Army Elementary School, Paris, France; and Miss Jane Silver, Principal US Army Elementary School, Le Mans, France.



families of service members in Europe as they support one another and advocate for military children living abroad.

Not all military families have the support that comes from living in a community populated by service members. Many families are geographically disbursed from services that provide continuity in the unique lives of military families. This continuity, this connectedness, is important as military families are often in varied states of transition; whether that transition is a change of duty station or long term separation from the service member. PTA can help provide continuity and connectedness for military families.

The Limuel family lives an hour away from the nearest military base. There is no one in their community that has experienced the stress of a long term military separation. Mrs. Jilene Limuel is the PTA president at her children's elementary school. She and her children have been separated from their service member for one year and five months. Their separation is not even half way over, as CS1 Limuel has received orders to remain overseas until the end of 2016. Originally, the family was packed and ready to move as a unit. However, two weeks prior to leaving, Mrs. Limuel received notification that due to the special medical needs of a family member, family travel orders would be revoked.

PTA helps keep Jilene and her two small children focused on the positive as she works to create, in her words, "a happy school." She works diligently with administration to build positive relationships with parents and staff. In this second year of separation, Jilene feels that the children are starting to show some signs that the separation is getting difficult. She wondered if she should pull out of her PTA leadership role and focus on home. The five and six year old were in accordance, "Mom! You have to stay in PTA because we like seeing you at school and we like doing PTA stuff with you." Upon her children's recommendation, Jilene is still staying strong with PTA.

Similarly, both inside the continental United States and out, PTA provides an opportunity where parents can be fortified by working in their children's school. Due to the many transitions, military spouses often find career development stymied. PTA provides opportunities for leadership and utilizes professional skill sets that translate well to resumes.

One such PTA leader is Mrs. Kay Trotter. Kay Trotter has worked in PTA leadership

for 45 years. Kay laughs, "I started as the ice cream chair and ended up vice president of parent involvement for the state of California." For the past six years, Kay has served as a PTA regional director for Colorado. At the height of the Iraq-Afghanistan war, Kay saw that her region was impacted by military families in transition and that there was a need to rethink her outreach campaign.

Kay utilized her partnerships with families and professionals in the military community to develop a Military Family Welcome Packet. The packet is an excellent example of how PTA can serve those who serve. It is thorough; providing not just information about registration and school agendas but goes as far as to suggest retail and community organizations that provide services or discounts to military members. The packet is grade specific and even includes a guide for children on how to make new friends. Many military impacted communities have developed similar welcome packets.

National PTA is dedicated to serving the unique needs of military families. The Military Family Support Committee strives to advocate on behalf of those who

serve our nation at home and overseas. The National PTA website has important information to help support these families in your community; including links to our Military Alliance Parent Partnerships (MAPP). These organizations work with PTA to provide educational resources to those who need it most.

Kathleen Brough is a member of the Military Family Support Committee.

European PTA Paris Convention 1962, and CS1 Limuel and his son (below)



Financing college can be tough. Experts say the sooner you start planning & saving the better prepared you will be.



4

COLLEGE SECRETS

By Lynnette Khalfani-Cox

EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW

If you're like the parents of most high school seniors, you're probably on an emotional roller coaster right now. You're no doubt thrilled at the college acceptance notices your child has received. However, you're probably feeling worried too, as you fret over how to pay those hefty college bills.

Before the "decision day" rolls around—and you have to put down a deposit to reserve your child's spot at his or her college of choice—there are several things you should know to ease the strain on your mind and your wallet. Here are four college secrets that parents should know.

College Secret #1:
The most prestigious school isn't necessarily the 'best' one.

Although it's exciting to have your son or daughter get accepted into a well-known school, recognize that a prestigious college may not be the ideal choice.

The 'best' school is actually the campus that offers the 'best fit' for your student academically, socially and financially.

Academically, your child should be well prepared for the educational climate of the chosen campus. It shouldn't be a stretch for him or her to keep up with other students; nor should your offspring feel like an intellectual giant among his or her college peers. Socially, the campus should feel comfortable and inviting, allowing your child to envision living in that campus community and calling it home. Financially, the college should be affordable for your family's budget, or it should provide enough free aid to make attendance possible, without driving your family into debt.

College Secret #2:
Private schools may not be as expensive as you think.

Don't get scared off from a private college or university just because the sticker price for tuition is exorbitant. In order to boost their undergraduate enrollments, most private schools offer large tuition discounts, in the form of institutional grants and scholarships.

In its most recent Tuition Discounting Study, The National Association of College and University Business Officers found that 88.9% of college freshmen at private schools received institutional grants in the 2013-14 school year. The average tuition grant/discount covered 53.5% of tuition and fees.

College Secret #3:
You can negotiate the financial aid offer—or appeal it.

Unsatisfied with the financial aid package your child received from his or her top choice school? If you obtained a better offer elsewhere, fax or email it to your desired college. As you do that, explain that your child really wants to attend the school in question, but that with the present financial aid package, the college would be too costly. Sometimes, these two steps will help you nab more free aid.

Also, if your personal circumstances have changed considerably (divorce, job layoff or a disability), you should always notify the college's financial aid office and ask for a "reconsideration" or "appeal" of the initial offer.

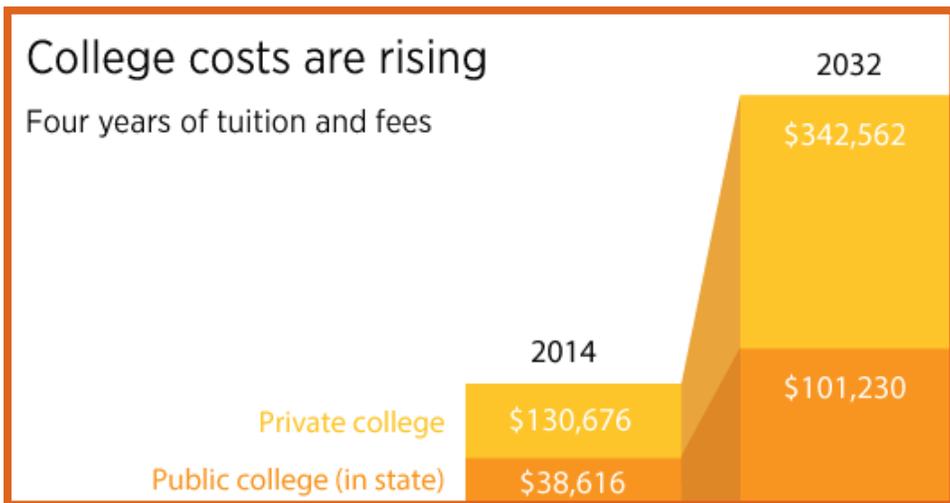
College Secret #4:
Your kid really will be OK.

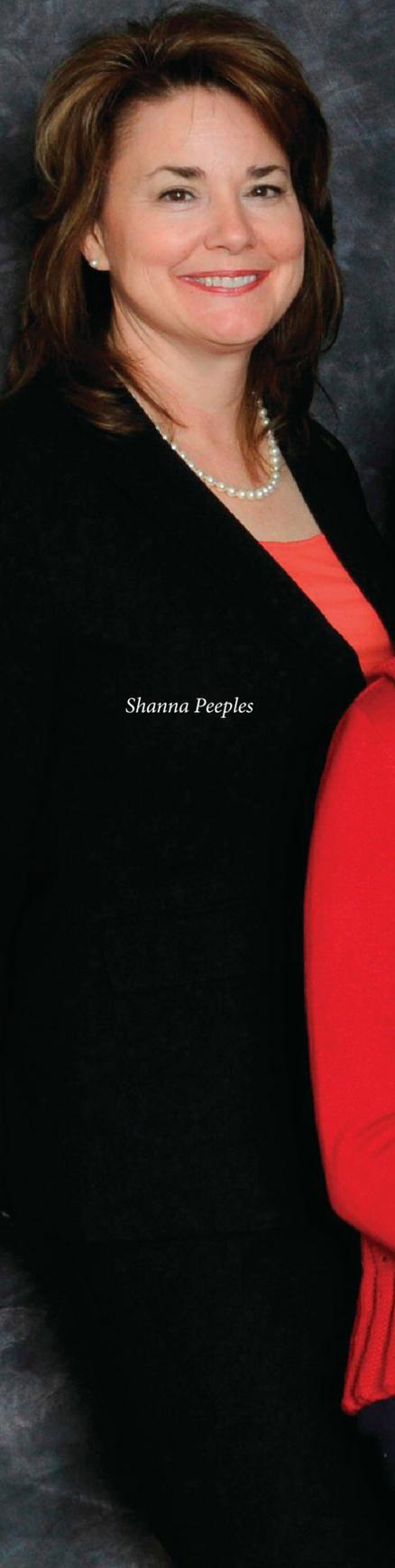
The college selection process is harrowing. But I'll bet you've been an involved parent and have done the best you can to get your son or daughter to this point.

So no matter where your child winds up, trust that he or she will be just fine – and will successfully transition into college life, and all that lies beyond it.

Lynnette Khalfani-Cox is a New York Times bestselling author and nationally known personal finance expert. Her latest books are: College Secrets: How to Save Money, Cut College Costs and Graduate Debt Free, and College Secrets for Teens: Money-Saving Ideas for the Pre-College Years.

Projected college cost over the next 18 years for 4-year institutions, Source: The College Board, 2013-2014.





Shanna Peebles



Ann Marie Corgill

Catherine Caine



Kathy Nimmer

Celebrating Teachers

Best of the best recognized in National Teacher of the Year program

By Shaina Croom

There's something to be said about an individual whose passion is to pour knowledge and a sense of purpose and self-confidence into the lives of our children. As any parent can attest, helping to shape a young person's growing mind is a challenging job by itself.

But a teacher does that and so much more. From balancing the needs of numerous students to following specific teaching standards to oftentimes making due with insufficient resources and funding, the job of a teacher is as overwhelming as it is underappreciated.

In this issue, we do our part to recognize the best of the best as we celebrate the 2015 Teacher of the Year finalists: Ann Marie Corgill of Alabama; Catherine Caine of Hawaii; Kathy Nimmer of Indiana, and Shanna Peeples of Texas.

From blindness to discouragement, these four teachers have overcome some of the toughest battles to become the cream of the crop. The finalists for the Teacher of the Year come from vastly different areas and backgrounds, but all share the common goal of making the future brighter for their students.

The National Teacher of the Year Program is a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with People to People Ambassador Programs. The National Teacher of the Year is selected by a panel representing 15 education organizations, including National PTA, and is recognized by the president of the United States in a White House ceremony in the spring.

Here, they share their secrets to patience, guidance and continuous instillation of wisdom and knowledge—all the attributes of a great teacher.



Shanna Peeples

Shanna Peeples teaches English at Palo Duro High School in Amarillo, Texas. Peeples worked as a disc jockey, medical assistant, pet sitter and journalist before becoming a teacher, a profession that she says eventually chose her. She taught seventh grade English Language Arts for about six years before moving to high school. She also teaches AP English and serves as the English department chair as well as an instructional coach for other teachers.

What motivated you to become a teacher?

Mrs. Belton, my seventh-grade teacher, taught me to write when I wanted to scream, or hit back or quit. Because I lived in a small town, I knew she'd heard about my parents' violent divorce. I came to her in tears one day, telling her that my mother was moving us 500 miles away.

"You're still part of this class, Shanna. You're still my student. You write us a letter every day," she said.

Her kindness shaped the kind of teacher I am. In fact, I repeated her words to one of my seniors when I signed her transfer sheet last week.

What makes your teaching style unique?

I believe in teaching students to use their talents and skills to make life better for others. Together, we brainstorm ways to connect their passion to real problems in our community. They often generate solutions that no one else has tried—one of the most effective ones being a group of bilingual students whose breast health presentation helped a woman whose language barrier made her afraid of seeking help. The girls who created the presentations

helped her find treatment where doctors discovered she had a malignancy. Thanks to their efforts, the woman is healthy today. Learning doesn't get more authentic than that.

What has been the most special moment for you as a teacher?

When my text tone went off that morning, I almost didn't look, thinking that it might be bad news about a family member in hospice. A cursory glance showed it was from my student, Viet Tran.

"I got in!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" it shouted through my screen. My heart nearly burst inside me.

Viet was born in the dark of a hospital with no electricity in Vietnam. Overcoming all odds, he is now a junior neuroscience major at Harvard. A volunteer for patients with Alzheimer's, he hopes to find a cure for the disease. I am so proud to have been his teacher and to continue to be his advisor and friend.



Kathy Nimmer

Kathy Nimmer teaches English 10, creative writing and senior composition at William Henry Harrison High School in West Lafayette, Indiana. Nimmer had long wanted to be a teacher, undeterred by a retinal disease that gradually took her vision. She describes her teaching style in four ways: believing in innovation, communication, passion and filling what is empty and emptying what is full.

What motivated you to become a teacher?

It started with a grotesque photo of a squid with a see-through head! It was in my third-grade science book the day I returned to school with a diagnosis of a rare retinal disease that would slowly claim my vision. My teacher pointed to that photo as she explained the science lesson I had missed because of the eye appointment. She understood my immense sorrow and was using learning to help heal me. Other compassionate teachers followed that aquatic inspiration. Ultimately, I knew that if I could reach students just as my own teachers had reached me, I could teach and teach well.

What makes your teaching style unique?

My teaching style involves innovation. My lessons are never "good enough" the next year; they need revision and revitalization. Likewise, my students cannot be satisfied to be stagnant in their learning. Then there is communication. This involves affirmation and clarification. It also involves positive letters written to parents about their students and weekly e-mails to families. At the core of my teaching style is passion. If I come to the classroom with a flat tone and a mechanical

approach, how can I expect students to be excited? Instead, I bring animation, spontaneity and joy. Weaving everything together is like a synchronized waltz that I never want to end.

What has been the most special moment for you as a teacher?

Two years ago, Mitch entered the VFW's Voice of Democracy Essay Contest, which I coordinate at my school. He won at the local, district, and state levels, becoming my first national qualifier after over twenty years of entrants. While I sat in the audience in Washington DC as Mitch received fourth place out of over 60,000 competitors, I realized that my ability to teach writing and expressive speaking had helped Mitch arrive at this incredible moment. Making it even more poignant, he had overcome serious medical challenges with courage and dignity. Mitch's moment in the national spotlight took my breath away.



Catherine Caine

Catherine Caine teaches a multiple subject curriculum for second grade students at Waikiki Elementary School in Honolulu, Hawaii. She has taught at Waikiki since 1992, and focuses on critical thinking, project-based learning, Philosophy for Children, and the habits of mind. Caine is a mentor teacher and a coordinator for both University of Hawaii and Hawaii Pacific University's teacher development programs.

What motivated you to become a teacher?

More than any other factor in my decision to become a teacher was the draw of the wonderment and joy I saw children experience so naturally as they became engaged in the process of learning. Initially, as I began college, my intention was to become a clinical psychologist. As part of my course requirements, I took a child development class which required me to spend a few hours a week in the laboratory school on campus. I walked in ready to observe and write up my assignment as a detached clinical psychologist. Then the unexpected happened, and my career shifted as I observed the brilliance of the children's dynamic interactions as they became engaged in the process of learning. As I visited the center over the next few months, my desire to be part of that energy and the joyful exuberance brought forth from engagement in the learning process led me to select teaching as my career.

What makes your teaching style unique?

Central to my teaching style is the focus on continuous learning and the belief that each student can grow and learn beyond the limits of the classroom. Ask any student in my class and they will tell you, "Learning goes on forever." Learning and teaching is a process that is intertwined, one driving the other.

On a daily basis we inquire, probe, and think out of the box. The classroom environment is set as a working society that allows students to use the Habits of Mind to be problem solvers, flexible thinkers, and responsible risk takers. Inquiry circles using Philosophy for Children provide a forum for the students to think deeply about issues that are important to them in their daily lives. The students understand that "how" we learn is as important as "what" we learn.

What has been the most special moment for you as a teacher?

Having taught for a few decades it is difficult to select one moment that stands apart from so many experiences. Those moments range from small student successes in the classroom to watching former students proudly graduate from high school and college.

However, when I focus on the importance I attach to making a difference for as many students as possible, my experience mentoring and coaching the many aspiring educators who have either been my student teachers or whom I have personally coached over the years comes to mind.



Ann Marie Corgill

Ann Marie Corgill teaches fourth grade at Cherokee Bend Elementary School in Mountain Brook, Alabama. The published author and frequent speaker wanted to be an architect but she felt unable to ever be successful in math, a subject she knew she'd need to use and understand in the profession she dreamed of pursuing. She instead turned that into inspiration to help students achieve in school, and life.

What motivated you to become a teacher?

For many years I dreamed of becoming an architect. However, my career choice was halted before I even began because of unfortunate experiences in high school math classes. The negative words of teachers solidified my belief that I wasn't a mathematician and couldn't pursue my passion of becoming an architect, a career that required a strong mathematical foundation. No, I'm not designing and building houses today, but for the past 20 years and over 500 students later, I've been designing curriculum and authentic experiences for my students. I've been building firm foundations for students to stand on as they learn, grow, and become successful, contributing members of society. I am an architect. I am a teacher. I am a builder of minds and hearts.

What makes your teaching style unique?

After 20 years of continuous professional learning and refining my practice, I've redefined and reinvented what it means to teach. I am no longer the "giver of knowledge" or the only teacher in the classroom, showing students "how things are done." I'm now a facilitator, co-collaborator, questioner, problem-pose, assessor, celebrator, autonomy-initiator, time-giver, and community builder of forever learners. Because being able to teach is a true

sign of understanding, I've learned to pass the teaching torch to my students, one that teaches both the mind and the heart.

What has been the most special moment for you as a teacher?

I consider my career a 20 year love story, with special moments too numerous to count. Each year I fall in love over and over again with my profession because of Abbey, who cried in September because she was "so behind in math", and by December is confidently and accurately writing multi-step division word problems. I teach because of John, the 68-year-old custodian, who learned to read with me before school every day for a whole year. I teach because of first grader, Mark Sears, who said to me as I announced my resignation from my school in New York, "I know why it's raining today; because you're moving, and the sky is crying with us. We will miss you so much, Ms. Corgill." I teach because of the e-mail from Rebecca, "Ms. Corgill, Remember me? I was in your first grade class in 1996. I'm now teaching sixth grade English language learners in Texas. You know I always wanted to be a teacher because of you!" My job isn't to build houses; it's to build a world of forever learners, teachers and change makers.



Why We Should APPRECIATE TEACHERS

By Vicki Phillips

A child's world is defined by a powerful connection unlike any other—the love and trust between a parent and a child. A child's parent or caretaker introduces them to new experiences, guides them through their struggles, and celebrates their successes. This parent-child bond can form the foundation for a child's attitudes and actions throughout his or her life.

This kind of mutual trust also lies at the heart of learning. Think of teaching a child to ride a bike, where you trust them to begin to pedal and balance on their own, while they trust you to catch them when they fall. A connection infused with this kind of trust makes learning possible.

That's why trust is so central to another key connection in a child's life: the bond a teacher forges in the classroom with his or her students. A teacher spends hours each day discovering the experiences, interests and traits that make each child unique—and finding ways to inspire each child to learn and achieve more. Teachers guide students' abilities to develop new skills, pursue new passions, and learn from mistakes, with every new learning opportunity requiring the same kind of mutual trust as that first bike ride.

Of course, teachers and parents play different roles in a child's life, and one cannot re-

place the other. A parent is an expert on their child. A teacher is an expert on their students' learning. But teachers and parents both need a child's trust in order to instill them with the confidence to explore, to aim higher, and accomplish their goals.

Parents know and value the influence a teacher can have in the classroom. It's important to remember that the bonds teachers form with each and every child in their classroom can support a love of learning that stays with students for the rest of their lives.

This spring, as we reflect on our children's growth and achievements throughout the school year, let's also remember the teachers who tapped into their unique talents and coached them through challenges to help them get there.

Let's celebrate teachers—not just by sending them a card or baking them cookies—but also by trusting them, listening to what they have

to say about our children and our schools, and ensuring they have the support they need to do their jobs. Let's respect teachers' expertise and acknowledge the critical importance of what they do, day in and day out.

We can learn a lot from teachers—even as adults—especially if we keep in mind that a supportive relationship between parents and teachers depends just as much on mutual trust as a healthy relationship between parent and child.

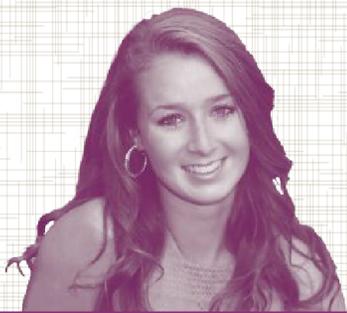
Vicki Phillips is director of Education, College Ready, for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. A former teacher and school superintendent, Phillips also served as Pennsylvania's secretary of education and chief state school officer at the state level in her home state of Kentucky, and with the U.S. Department of Education. Find her on Twitter @drvickip.

NSHSS scholars making a difference.

NSHSS, the world's largest honor society, recognizes academic excellence and inspires youth to make a difference. We are proud to highlight our student members who are having a positive impact on society, such as these recipients of the Abercrombie & Fitch Anti-Bullying Scholar Awards – sponsored through the NSHSS Foundation.

These awards provide college scholarships for high school seniors who academically persevered while experiencing bullying, or have led anti-bullying efforts in their schools and communities. Recipients may renew their scholarships for three years as they continue their advocacy in college. Four of the ten scholarship winners are highlighted below.

Margaret Castillo



Mountain Range
High School
Thornton, CO

Margaret directed Mountain Range High School's first *The Day Without Hate* campaign, encouraging peace and camaraderie among all students. She is now training a new coordinator to carry on the state-wide anti-violence program as she continues her studies at the University of Missouri.

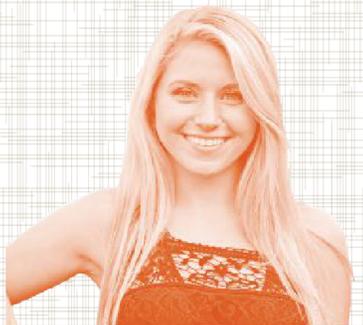
Jacob Gardenswartz



Francis Parker
School
La Mesa, CA

Under Jacob's leadership, *Theater of Peace* has raised more than \$10k in grants; and educated 5,000-plus students about peaceful methods to diffuse bullying confrontations – garnering local, state, and national recognition for the theatre program – including many accolades from President Obama.

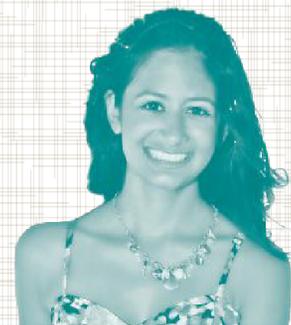
Melanie Hubbard



Rutland Senior
High School
North Clarendon, VT

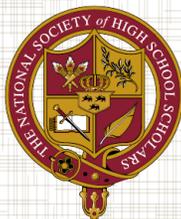
After being a victim of cyber bullying herself, Melanie founded the anti-bullying organization, *Cyber You* at Rutland Senior High School. While Melanie has moved on to continue her education at Boston University, the group remains a viable source of support for bullying victims everywhere.

Suchi Amin



Murrieta Valley
High School
Murrieta, CA

As Founder of the anonymous Facebook accounts entitled, *Smile BeHappy*, Suchi combats "society's expectations of likes, followers, and image" that often distorts a teen's perception of themselves and reality. She has been widely commended for establishing a critical cyber community for more than 500 students.



THE INVISIBLE POPULATION

How PTA local leaders can welcome, engage, and support foster families

By Sam Macer and Kris Carey Prevatte



Foster families are an “invisible population.” If one hundred children were on a school playground, you couldn’t—or shouldn’t—be able to tell which ones were foster youth. If you were at a mall, you couldn’t pick out the foster families that pass you by.

According to the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, education has the potential to be a positive counterweight to abuse, neglect, separation, impermanence, and instability for the 400,000+ children and youth served in foster care each year in the United States.

PTA’s mission is to advocate for every child. But how does a local PTA welcome and support an invisible population?

PTA’s duty is to be welcoming in general and more specifically promote efforts to raise student achievement.

However, because of privacy considerations, essentially the only way to know if a specific child or caregiver is in the foster care system is to create a welcoming environment that encourages them to self-identify.

Local PTAs have the potential to help foster families at the grassroots level while increasing their PTA’s value and relevance within their community. The engagement level specific to supporting foster families can be as little or as much as an individual PTA chooses; don’t be afraid to do just a few things in this arena, for fear that it’s not “enough.” It all helps.

For example, local PTAs could:

- Proactively, deliberately welcome foster parents into the PTA. Once the foster parents self-identify they no longer are a part of the “invisible population.” Welcoming foster families into local PTAs can be a part of an overall effort to become more diverse and engage underserved families.
- Establish a child welfare committee with one of its goals being the support specifically of foster families. The committee could be called the Diversity Committee with a sub-goal to help foster parents.
- Establish partnerships with the local foster care agency and ask how the PTA could share its parent involvement expertise to support the agency’s foster parents.
- Source and fund the delivery of a teacher training to be presented during a professional development day. Teachers need to understand the challenges that foster youth face and potential impact on classroom management and test scores. This same training could be adjusted to be presented to foster parents.
- Engage local legislators or foster care agencies to suggest that parent involvement training be included as one of the trainings offered to foster parents. All foster parents are required to attend annual training, so why not focus on parent involvement as one of the trainings?

- Ask a known foster parent to write articles about relevant foster care concerns and resources for the local PTA newsletter.
- Individuals with a passion for creating a foster parent PTA in their state can check with their state PTA to determine chartering requirements. Check out Maryland’s Foster Parent PTA as a potential example.

In addition to increasing the number of paid local PTA memberships and increasing PTA awareness and relevance within the community, increasing the support for teachers will be an important outcome for engaging and welcoming foster families. If foster families become more involved and connected to the local school and the PTA, the critical home/school connection will be strengthened. Foster youth sometimes exhibit challenging behaviors; however, when foster parents work effectively with the teachers, the disruptive behaviors become more manageable.

Foster families may be an “invisible population,” but the gains that can come from local PTAs choosing to support this population can have very visible and positive results.

Sam Macer is the founder of the first foster parent PTA, located in Baltimore, MD.

Every Child in Focus: Foster Children

National PTA’s Every Child in Focus, supported in part by a corporate contribution from LifeLock, is a campaign centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues.

For in-depth resources to support foster families as well as other special populations, please visit PTA.org/everychild.

Fostering Parent Involvement—PTA Success Story

There was a foster parent who came to a PTA meeting in tears because she thought she had done all that she could for the 12-year-old in her care. Nothing seemed to be working to help the child have better outcomes.

Within a year the PTA helped turn things around. The foster parent simply did not have the parent involvement skills she needed to make a difference. She did not understand the benefits of advocating for the child to receive external community resources and she did not understand how to coordinate an effective parent/teacher conference to increase and sustain academic achievement.

Within a year, things were working for her and the child. She attended PTA training in parent involvement, advocacy, behavior management, creating a foster care team and using effective parent/teacher conference as an educational tool.



Laura Runyeon (center), Youth's Benefit Elementary School PTA president, holds the 2015 National PTA Local Outstanding Advocacy Award at this year's Takes Action dinner during the annual National PTA Legislative Conference. Also pictured (Left to right): National PTA President Otha Thornton, National PTA President-elect Laura Bay, VP of Advocacy Shannon Sevier, Legislative Committee member Elizabeth Ysla Leight, National PTA Secretary-Treasurer Sophia Waugh, National PTA Interim Executive Director Joanne Dunne and Maryland PTA president Ray Leone.

National PTA Legislative Conference 2015

National PTA recently wrapped up its annual Legislative Conference in Washington DC. Held March 10-13, 2015, the conference gave participants the chance to discuss and learn more about PTA's public policy priorities via interactive workshops with industry leading experts, keynote speakers, and advocacy trainings led by National PTA Government Affairs staff. Over 220 attendees also got the chance to network with PTA peers and share best practices, as well as honor grassroots champions and policy leaders at the PTA *Takes Action* dinner.

During the conference, PTA members from across the country were provided the opportunity to advocate at the federal level on behalf of PTA. Members met with their Senators, Congressmen/Congresswomen and staff about the importance of family engagement and asked them to co-sponsor the Family Engagement in Education Act of 2015, which was introduced March 2, 2015.



Photos by Lifetouch

At a **National PTA School of Excellence**, families feel welcomed and empowered to support student success, and PTA is a key partner for continuous school improvement.



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Asociación de Padres y Maestros: Servir a los que sirven

Por Kathleen Brough, en representación del Comité Militar de Apoyo Familiar

La Asociación Nacional de Padres y Maestros tiene una larga historia de defender a hijos de militares y apoyar a las familias en su transición. Actualmente hay más de dos millones de hijos de militares que viven en los Estados Unidos y el exterior. En promedio, los hijos de militares se mudan de 6 a 9 veces a lo largo de su educación, y muchas veces experimentan largos períodos de separación de sus padres en servicio. Incluso con las políticas federales actuales que mudan a las fuerzas militares de regreso al hogar, las familias pueden enfrentarse con cambios agitados que extienden la fuerza de su resiliencia. Sin embargo, no todas las familias militares son iguales. Algunas familias pueden vivir en bases militares o cerca de ellas. Algunas pueden residir en una base en Italia o Corea. Y algunos niños pueden ser el único de la escuela que sepa lo que es un emplazamiento militar. El compromiso de la Asociación de Padres y Maestros ofrece no sólo oportunidades para que los padres se involucren en la escuela de sus hijos, sino que ofrece una estructura comunitaria y estabilidad durante las transiciones. Es imperativo

que la Asociación de Padres y Maestros siga incluyendo a las familias militares en sus comunidades de defensoría y apoyo. La Asociación Nacional de Padres y Maestros y la DoDEA (Department of Defense Education Activity) han trabajado en conjunto para apoyar a los hijos de militares por más de 50 años. La DoDEA es un distrito escolar que sirve a hijos de militares en escuelas que se encuentran en las instalaciones de todo el mundo y en los Estados Unidos. En 1962, la Asociación Europea de Padres y Maestros (EPTA) realizó una conferencia en París donde ofrecieron una presentación especial en los Cuarteles Superiores de las Fuerzas Aliadas de Europa. Una de sus primeras resoluciones fue asegurar fondos de subsidios federales para la educación de los hijos de los militares. La Asociación Europea de Padres y Maestros estableció un precedente legislativo. Actualmente, existe legislación que brinda fondos federales tanto a la DoDEA como a escuelas públicas que sostienen a una gran población de hijos de militares. La DoDEA explica: “La Asociación Europea de Padres y Maestros

es un bien invaluable para nuestro sistema escolar de nuestro Departamento de Defensa. Las unidades locales de la PTA y la PTSA han desarrollado programas para apoyar un mayor



Director of main panel discussion, Spring Conference, European Congress of American Parents and Teachers, at Karlsruhe, Germany, 13-17 April 1959. Left to right: Dr. Charles Grealy, Supervisor of 10 Navy Schools, Naples, Italy; Miss Arvyla Barrett, President of Army Elementary Schools, Paris; Frances and Bill Jane Miller, Principal of Army Elementary School, Le Mans, France.



compromiso en la educación de sus hijos. La EPTA ha concedido un reconocimiento significativo a nuestros excepcionales logros con muchos de nuestros alumnos, educadores, administradores y padres voluntarios. Entre sus mayores éxitos, la EPTA ha trabajado para promover seguridad en la escuela y los autobuses, enriquecer el currículo y abogar en representación de nuestros niños ante líderes militares superiores y en el Congreso de los Estados Unidos.” Actualmente, la PTA aún reside con las familias de los miembros en servicio en Europa, ya que se apoyan mutuamente y abogan por los hijos de militares que viven en el exterior.

No todas las familias militares cuentan con el apoyo que conlleva vivir en una comunidad poblada por miembros en servicio. Muchas familias se encuentran alejadas geográficamente de los servicios que ofrece la comunidad de las vidas sin igual de las familias militares. Esta continuidad, esta conectividad, es importante, ya que las familias militares muchas veces se encuentran en diversos estados de transición; sea ésta un cambio de estación de servicio o una separación a largo plazo del miembro en servicio. La PTA puede ayudar a ofrecer continuidad y conectividad para las familias militares.

La familia Limuel vive a una hora de la base militar más cercana. No hay nadie en su comunidad que haya experimentado el estrés de una separación militar a largo plazo. La Sra. Jilene Limuel es la presidenta de la Asociación de Padres y Maestros en la escuela primaria de sus hijos. Ella y sus hijos están separados de su miembro en servicio desde hace un año y cinco meses. Su separación ni siquiera ha llegado a la mitad, ya que el CS1 Limuel ha recibido órdenes de permanecer en el exterior hasta finales del 2016. Originalmente, la familia empaqué y estuvo lista para moverse como unidad. Sin embargo, dos semanas antes de partir, la Sra. Limuel recibió un aviso indicando que a causa de las necesidades médicas especiales de un miembro de la familia, las órdenes de viaje de la familia serían revocadas.

La PTA ayuda a Jilene y a sus dos hijos pequeños a centrarse en lo positivo, ya que trabaja para crear, en sus palabras, “una escuela feliz”. Trabaja diligentemente con la administración para construir relaciones positivas con los padres y el personal. En este segundo año de su separación, Jilene siente que los niños están empezando a mostrar algunas señales de que la separación se les está haciendo difícil.

Se ha preguntado si debería retirarse de su dirección en la PTA y centrarse en el hogar. Sus dos hijos, de cinco y seis años, coincidieron: “¡Mamá! Tienes que quedarte en la PTA porque nos gusta verte en la escuela y nos gusta hacer cosas de la asociación contigo.” Ante la recomendación de sus hijos, Jilene conserva sus fuertes lazos con la PTA.

De igual forma, tanto dentro de los Estados Unidos continentales como afuera, la PTA ofrece una oportunidad para que los padres se fortalezcan trabajando en la escuela de sus hijos. Debido a la variedad de transiciones, las esposas de los militares suelen ver obstaculizado su desarrollo laboral. La PTA ofrece oportunidades de liderazgo y utiliza herramientas profesionales que luego se ajustan bien a los currículum vitae.

Uno de estos casos es la líder de la Asociación de Padres y Maestros Kay Trotter. Kay Trotter ha trabajado en liderazgo de la PTA por 45 años. Kay comenta riendo: “Comencé como directora de helados y terminé como vicepresidente de compromiso familiar para el estado de California.” En los últimos seis años, Kay ha brindado sus servicios como directora regional de la PTA para Colorado. En el apogeo de la guerra entre Iraq y Afganistán, Kay notó que su región se veía impactada por familias militares en transición y que había una necesidad de repensar su campaña de extensión. Kay utilizó colaboraciones con familias y profesionales de la comunidad militar para desarrollar un Paquete de Bienvenida para la Familia Militar. El paquete es un excelente ejemplo sobre cómo la PTA puede servir a aquellos que sirven. Es integral, y ofrece no sólo información sobre inscripciones y agendas escolares, sino que llega hasta organizacio-

nes de la comunidad y de ventas minoristas que ofrecen servicios o descuentos para los miembros militares. El paquete es específico por grados, e incluso incluye una guía para los niños sobre cómo hacer nuevos amigos. Muchas comunidades militares impactadas han desarrollado paquetes de bienvenida similares. Visite el sitio web de la Asociación de Padres y Maestros de Colorado para compartir sus estrategias de extensión y compromiso familiar respecto a las familias militares.

La Asociación Nacional de Padres y Maestros está dedicada al servicio de las necesidades sin igual de las familias militares. El Comité Militar de Apoyo Familiar lucha por representar a quienes sirven a nuestra nación en el hogar y el exterior. El sitio web de la Asociación Nacional de Padres y Maestros tiene importante información para ayudar a las familias militares de nuestra comunidad, incluyendo enlaces a la MAPP (Military Alliance Parent Partnerships). Estas organizaciones trabajan con la PTA para ofrecer recursos educativos a las familias militares.



Europea Convenio de París PTA 1962, y CS1 Limuel y su hijo (arriba)



LA POBLACIÓN INVISIBLE

Cómo los líderes locales de la Asociación de Padres y Maestros pueden hacer participar y apoyar a las familias adoptivas

Por Sam Macer y Kris Carey Prevatte



Las familias adoptivas son una “población invisible”. Si hay cien niños en el patio de una escuela, no podrían -o no deberían- poder decir cuáles son niños en cuidados de acogida. Si estuvieran en un centro comercial, no podrían identificar a las familias adoptivas que pasaran junto a ustedes.

De acuerdo con National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, la educación tiene el potencial de ser un contrapeso positivo ante el abuso, la negligencia, la separación, la falta de permanencia y la inestabilidad para los más de 400.000 niños y jóvenes puestos en cuidados de acogida anualmente en los Estados Unidos.

La misión de la asociación es abogar por cada uno de los niños. ¿Pero cómo recibir y respaldar a una población invisible?

El deber de la Asociación de Padres y Maestros es dar la bienvenida en general y más específicamente promover los esfuerzos para elevar los logros entre los alumnos.

Sin embargo, por cuestiones de privacidad, la única forma de saber si un niño o cuidador específico se encuentra en el sistema de cuidados de acogida, es crear un ambiente acogedor que los anime a autoidentificarse.

Las asociaciones locales tienen el potencial de ayudar a las familias en el nivel más inicial aumentando al mismo tiempo su valor y relevancia dentro de la Asociación de Padres y Maestros y su comunidad. El nivel de compromiso específico para apoyar a las familias de acogida puede ser tan pequeño o tan grande como cada asociación lo decida; no tengan miedo de hacer sólo unas pocas cosas en este ámbito, ya que el miedo no es “suficiente”. Todo ayuda.

Por ejemplo, las asociaciones locales podrían:

- Dar la bienvenida en forma deliberada y proactiva a los padres sustitutos. Una vez que los padres sustitutos se autoidentifiquen, ya no serán parte de la “población invisible”. Dar la bienvenida a estas familias dentro de las asociaciones locales de padres y maestros puede ser parte de un esfuerzo general por encontrar una mayor diversidad y hacer participar a familias desprotegidas.
- Establecer un comité de bienestar para los niños con el apoyo específico de las familias de acogida como uno de sus objetivos. El comité podría llamarse Comité de Diversidad con un subobjetivo de ayudar a los padres sustitutos.
- Establecer colaboraciones con las agencias locales de cuidado de acogida y preguntar cómo podríamos compartir nuestra experiencia de compromiso de los padres para que la agencia pueda apoyar a los padres sustitutos.
- Brindar y solventar la entrega de un entrenamiento docente a presentar durante el día de desarrollo profesional. Los maestros deben comprender los desafíos que enfrentan los jóvenes de acogida y el impacto potencial sobre la gestión en el aula y los resultados de los exámenes. Este mismo entrenamiento podría ajustarse para presentarlo a los padres sustitutos.

- Comprometer a legisladores locales o agencias de cuidado de acogida para sugerir la inclusión de un entrenamiento para padres como uno de los cursos ofrecidos para padres sustitutos. Todos los padres sustitutos deben asistir a entrenamientos anuales, entonces, ¿por qué no centrarse en el compromiso de los padres en uno de los entrenamientos?
- Pedirle a un padre sustituto conocido que escriba artículos sobre preocupaciones y recursos relevantes para la atención de acogida en el Boletín de Noticias de la asociación de padres y maestros local.
- Las personas apasionadas por crear una Asociación de Padres y Maestros con padres sustitutos en su estado pueden consultar a la asociación correspondiente de su estado para determinar los requisitos de los estatutos. Consulte la Asociación de Padres y Maestros de Padres Sustitutos de Maryland como posible ejemplo.

Además de aumentar el número de membresías locales de la asociación y de aumentar la concientización de la misma y la relevancia dentro de la comunidad, aumentar el apoyo para maestros será un resultado importante para comprometer y acoger a las familias sustitutas. Si estas familias se comprometen y conectan más con la escuela y la asociación local, se fortalecerá la conexión crítica entre hogar y escuela. Los jóvenes de acogida a veces muestran comportamientos desafiantes; sin embargo, cuando los padres sustitutos trabajan eficientemente con los maestros, los comportamientos perturbadores se vuelven más manejables.

Las familias sustitutas pueden ser una “población invisible”, pero las ventajas que pueden derivarse de la opción de las asociaciones por apoyar a esta población pueden tener resultados visibles y muy positivos.

Sam Macer es el fundador de la primera Asociación de Padres y Maestros de Padres Sustitutos.

Cada niño en foco: Niños acogidos

La campaña de la Asociación Nacional de Padres y Maestros Every Child in Focus, apoyada parcialmente por una contribución corporativa de LifeLock, es una campaña centrada en el fortalecimiento del compromiso familiar en las escuelas que celebra distinciones y logros culturales de importancia a la vez que destaca soluciones para posibles problemas educativos.

Para obtener recursos en profundidad con que apoyar a las familias sustitutas o a otras poblaciones especiales, visite PTA.org/everychild.

Compromiso de Padres Sustitutos: historia de éxito de la PTA

Hubo una madre sustituta que llegó llorando a un encuentro de la Asociación de Padres y Maestros porque creía que había hecho todo lo posible por el niño de 12 años que atendía. Nada parecía funcionar para que el niño tuviera mejores resultados.

En un año, la asociación dió vuelta las cosas. La madre sustituta simplemente no tenía las herramientas de compromiso que necesitaba para marcar una diferencia. No comprendía los beneficios de abogar por el niño para recibir recursos externos de la comunidad, ni entendía como coordinar una conferencia padre-maestro efectiva para aumentar y sostener el logro académico.

En un año, las cosas iban bien para ella y el niño. Asistió a un entrenamiento de la asociación sobre compromiso de los padres, defensoría y gestión del comportamiento, creando un equipo de cuidado de acogida y usando conferencias padre-maestro efectivas como herramienta educativa.

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