



A National PTA® Initiative

The
Center for Family
Engagement®

Facilitating Community Listening Sessions:

A GUIDE FOR PTAs

Introduction

What is a community listening session?

A community listening session or focus group brings together a group of people to discuss a specific issue. A PTA may want to host a listening session to get feedback on specific programs or initiatives, discuss a recent community event, or to simply offer an opportunity for families to share their thoughts and ideas. The listening session outlined in this guide focuses on getting feedback on various families' communication with the school, particularly in relation to their child's development of social, emotional and other life skills. The guide also includes a closing survey to distribute to participants.

Why host a community listening session?

Listening sessions provide families the opportunity to express their opinions, share ideas and tell their stories. They are valuable to your PTA because they provide helpful feedback and engage the community in a meaningful discussion.

These exchanges with families in your community will help your PTA offer family engagement opportunities that are more transformative. The Four 'I's of transformative family engagement outline how your PTA can enhance its practices by becoming more **inclusive**, **individualized**, **integrated** and **impactful** in your approach to family engagement.

These community listening sessions will specifically help you to...

- Determine how families currently engage with their children's schools and teachers
- Find out how families would ideally like to partner with their children's schools and teachers
- Learn how your PTA can better serve needs of families in your school and district
- Provide data about family engagement to local leaders and stakeholders who may be interested in developing community partnerships

The Four I's of Transformative Family Engagement

Inclusive – PTAs invite diverse perspectives, question their assumptions and intentionally build relationships.

Individualized – PTAs are responsive, personalize their outreach efforts and offer tailored experiences to meet the unique needs of every family.

Integrated – PTAs go beyond one-time events, link their work to learning and collaborate with educators.

Impactful – PTAs help families to develop their knowledge and skills, offer opportunities practice and interact, and they gather feedback to measure their success.

INCLUSIVE

Embracing and valuing diverse perspectives.



INDIVIDUALIZED

Meeting the unique needs of every family and child.



INTEGRATED

Connecting and aligning with the educational system.



IMPACTFUL

Empowering families to support their child's success.



Tips for Planning a Community Listening Session

✓ **Choose a Venue.** Find a comfortable, easily accessible location.

► **Questions to Consider:**

- Is there enough space for 8-12 participants to sit comfortably?
- Is the location convenient and accessible via public transportation?
- Is the location wheelchair accessible? (ramps, elevators, automatic doors, etc.)
- Will participants be able to easily hear and see each other? (lighting, acoustics, etc.)

✓ **Choose a Time to Meet.** Each focus group will be 90 minutes.

► **Questions to Consider:**

- When will be most convenient for the participants you are trying to engage?
- When will be a convenient time to get to the venue? (consider traffic, parking, etc.)
- Is the time you are choosing near a mealtime? If so, be sure to provide food.

✓ **Develop a Recruitment Strategy to Maximize Participation.** Create a plan for reaching out to families.

- Determine your target audience
- Connect with local partners that can promote the opportunity to your target audience(s)

- Conduct individualized outreach to invite participants (we recommend starting with a phone call, see script below)
- Choose a small incentive for participation (e.g., a gift card, meal, raffle prize, etc.)
- Remove barriers for participation
 - Provide transportation or vouchers for public transportation
 - Provide childcare at the event
- Send a reminder text the day before, asking participants to confirm their attendance

✓ **Be Prepared & Welcoming.** Create an inclusive, relaxing environment.

- Arrive early to ensure the space is ready
- Post signs so the room is easy to find

✓ **Thank Your Participants.** Send an email thanking each participant and encouraging them to stay involved.

TIP

Consider hosting the focus group in tandem with another community event that families are already planning to attend!

After Your Listening Session

Analyze the data. You don't need to be a statistics expert to conduct data analysis. Review your notes from the listening session and identify key themes, recurring trends in feedback, and persistent areas for concern. Look at the surveys to see how families responded to each question. What there a big range in the numbers or was it consistent? Consider creating an excel file of all the survey data and calculating the averages for each question. Summarize what you find into a few bullets or slides to report to others.

Reach out to key stakeholders. Once you've compiled families' feedback and concerns, consider who the key players are who can help you to address some of these issues. Share your findings with the school principal, superintendent, school board, city council, your PTA board/members and leaders of other partner organizations. Use the time as an opportunity to explore potential avenues for collaboration.

Circle back to your listening session participants. It's important to re-engage with your listening session participants to share the results with them. And invite them to stay involved and consider joining PTA. Use the focus group participant follow-up sheet to capture this information.

Sample Script for Inviting Participants

Hello, I'm [NAME] calling from the [NAME of PTA] PTA to invite you to participate in an upcoming listening session. Our PTA has received a grant from the National PTA to hear directly from families about how they want to be engaged in their child's education. We are calling to invite you to be part of this listening session by participating in a 90-minute discussion with other families. We got your contact information because [person/organization] is helping us reach out to families in our community.

The focus group will be hosted on [DATE & TIME] at [LOCATION] and you will receive [insert incentive here] for your participation. In addition, childcare will be provided. The focus group will last for about 90 minutes and your participation would help us gain the insight we need to empower families in our community. Are you able to attend?

If Yes...

"Wonderful. I really appreciate it. I have a few more questions to register you for the focus group."

"Will you be bringing any of your children along with you? If so, how many?"

"Do you know how to get to [LOCATION]? Would you like me to send you directions as a follow-up?"

"Do you need a ride or transportation voucher to attend?"

"What is the best way to follow-up with you for a reminder and final details for participating in the focus group? Email or phone?"

Thank you again for agreeing to share your perspective on our school district and PTA can better engage families in their child's education! I am confirming that you will attend the focus group on [DATE] at [LOCATION] and that we will be providing [CHILDCARE AND/OR TRANSPORTATION DETAILS].

If No...

"Okay, thank you for your time. I hope to see you at a future event!"

Send a reminder!

24-48 hours prior to your listening session text the participants a reminder and have them confirm their attendance. See sample text message below.

"[PTA Name]'s community listening session is happening tomorrow at [TIME] at [LOCATION]. Please reply 'Y' to confirm you will be there!"

Facilitator's Guide

Choose a facilitator who is trusted in your community and have them use our Facilitator's Guide to lead the conversation.

Agenda (75 min.)

Welcome & Introductions (5 min.)

Setting the Stage (5 min.)

Framing Activity (15 min.)

Group Questions & Discussion (25 min.)

Closing Activity (15 min.)

Closing & Thank You (3 min.)

Exit Survey (7 min.)

Welcome & Introductions (5 min.)

- A. Introductions: Name, age(s) of kid(s) and what school(s) they attend
- B. *Purpose of our meeting tonight* (2 min.)
 - Decades of national research proves that family engagement matters for kid's success at school. That success can be defined many ways. We usually think about academics, but we know you worry about all kinds of things for your children. We all want our kids to be happy, healthy, confident, respectful, etc. We really want to dive into how you want the partnership between you and your school to look to bring out the best in your child.
 - Research also shows that some kinds of engagement matters more when it comes to the overall social, emotional and academic success of students. PTA wants to better understand **YOUR** personal experiences guiding your child's school success to see if it aligns with the national findings.
 - Why? So together we can understand your local experiences and help inform

the national work when it comes to families' needs when it comes to helping with your student's whole child success.

C. *Structure and Protocol* (2 min.)

To help our learning, we are going to do three things together tonight.

1. We are going to do an activity that will help ground us in your hopes for your child.
2. Then, we will dive deeper by focusing on your experience interacting with your children's teachers.
3. Finally, we have a short survey at the end to connect your experience with next steps locally

D. *Group agreement* (1 min.)

Create a safe space: Speak from your own experience, hold confidentiality, refrain from problem solving, today we're just here to listen. If we report on your comments or feedback, it will not be associated with your name or any other identifying information. Any questions or concerns? Let's get started!

Framing Activity (20 min.)

We are going to do an activity to help us better understand what you want from your child's school experiences. I'm going to ask you a few questions and I encourage you to call out your answers. I will write your responses on the chart paper and we'll revisit these throughout our discussion.

- What kind of adults do you want your children to become?
- How do you want them to act?
- What skills do you want them to have?

Now that we have a good list, I'm going to read through these words and phrases, and I want you to think about how well your children's teachers are doing to teach or reinforce each of these areas of development. If you believe these are areas of priority for your children's teachers, and they do an excellent job, hold up three fingers, if it's not a priority and teachers don't build these skills at all, hold up one. If it's somewhere in the middle, or so-so, hold up two fingers.

You'll notice that these words and phrases encompass a lot more than traditional academic subjects like reading, writing and math. When schools foster students' development beyond academics, when they focus on social and emotional, cognitive, identity development in ways that you have mentioned, we call that whole child learning. Today's discussion will focus on how your children's teachers collaborate with you on your child's development in these ways.

Group Questions & Discussion (25 min.)

- A.** Think of your child's favorite teacher.
- How would you characterize the way you and that teacher interacted?
 - What made it positive for you?
 - How did you and this teacher communicate?
 - What did you communicate about?
 - How would you describe what this teacher focused on in class? How did you know?
 - How would you describe how this teacher supported your child? How did you know?
 - Can you think of conversations you had with this teacher around academics and life skills?

- B.** Think of a teacher your child has struggled with at school.

- How would you characterize the way you and that teacher interacted?
- What made it challenging for you?
- How did you and this teacher communicate?
- What did you communicate about?
- How would you describe what this teacher focused on in class? How did you know?
- How would you describe this teacher's relationship with your child? How could you tell?
- Can you think of interactions with this teacher around both academics and life skills?

Closing Activity (15 min.)

Let's look back at the list we created earlier [Reread a few of the examples/domains]. How do you want to be engaged in these different learning domains? How do you want to collaborate with your child's teacher in these areas?

As you share, start your sentence with "I wonder," "I wish" or "I want" and I will fill out the chart papers. I will also leave these markers out when we're done with our session, so you are welcome to add to the posters before you leave.

Thank You & Closing (3 min.)

Survey (7 min.)

NOTE: Please have participants place their surveys into a large envelope when they are done. To ensure privacy, do not collect the surveys by hand.

National PTA Family Engagement and Whole Child Learning Questionnaire

National PTA is interested in understanding more about your perspective on your child's education and your involvement. Please take five minutes to complete this short questionnaire. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential and will not be linked to your name or any other identifying information and will not be shared outside of National PTA.

Circle the number which most corresponds with your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Schools in our district value the importance of getting to know each student as an individual.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools in our district value partnering with families.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools in our district prioritize students' mental health and well-being.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools in our district prioritize students' physical health and well-being.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools in our district have adequate resources (funding, facilities, staffing, etc.) for involving families.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools in our district offer a challenging curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools in our district prioritize student safety.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools in our district provide adequate information about our children's learning and progress.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools in our district provide adequate opportunities to be involved in our children's education.	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the following demographic questions:

Are you a PTA member?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer to Self-Identify _____

What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55+

What is your ethnicity?

(please select all that apply)

- ☐ African American or Black
- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Caucasian or White
- ☐ Latino/a or Hispanic
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Other

Write the number of children you have in each of the following grades:

- _____ Not yet in Kindergarten
- _____ K – 5th grade
- _____ 6th – 8th grade
- _____ 9th – 12th grade

What is your education level?

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Graduate degree

What is your household income?

- ☐ Less than \$20,000
- ☐ \$20,000 to \$34,999
- ☐ \$35,000 to \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 to \$99,999
- ☐ Over \$100,000



[INSERT YOUR PTA LOGO]

Listening Session Participant Follow Up

Are you interested in staying engaged?

- ☐ Yes, contact me about becoming a PTA member
- ☐ Yes, include me in your updates & other outreach
- ☐ No thanks

If yes...

Full Name	Email Address	Phone
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Preferred method of Contact: ☐ Call ☐ Text ☐ Email



[INSERTE SU LOGOTIPO DE PTA]

Seguimiento del Participante de la Sesión de Escucha

¿Está Ud. interesado en seguir participando en oportunidades así?

- ☐ Sí, contácteme para ser miembro de la PTA
- ☐ Sí, inclúyeme en tus actualizaciones y otras actividades de divulgación
- ☐ No, gracias

En caso afirmativo...

Nombre Completo	Dirección de Correo Electrónico	Teléfono
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Método de contacto preferido: ☐ Llamada ☐ Texto ☐ Email