



Five Years of Transforming Family Engagement



Introduction

The Center for Family Engagement started as an idea—and priority—of National PTA’s Board of Directors. Designing the Center began in earnest in 2017 when listening sessions and interviews were conducted with over 200 PTA leaders and allied organizations to better clarify the unique value that the Center could bring to National PTA, as well as family engagement efforts nationwide.

In 2018, National PTA launched the Center for Family Engagement with a clear purpose: to embed transformative family engagement practices, programs and policies across the educational system so that every parent is treated as a valuable partner in their child’s education.

The Center for Family Engagement set out to achieve this mission by:

- ▶ elevating innovative approaches, cutting-edge research and best practices in transformative family engagement,
- ▶ empowering PTAs across the country to be leaders in these efforts through grant and recognition opportunities,
- ▶ influencing transformative family engagement decisions and resources by contributing to the national research and policy agenda and
- ▶ ensuring sustainability and effectiveness.

Five years later, National PTA reflects on the Center for Family Engagement’s learnings, accomplishments and goals for the future.

“The Center for Family Engagement has done tremendous work to highlight effective transformative family engagement and has empowered PTAs across the country to be leaders in these efforts.”

Nathan R. Monell, CAE
National PTA Executive Director

Elevating Best Practices in Transformative Family Engagement

The Center for Family Engagement aims to produce accessible, engaging content that informs families and parent leaders and sparks dialogue in communities. With these goals in mind, the Center launched the podcast “Notes from the Backpack” and the video series “10 Minutes to PTA the Transformative Way” and has released 10 webinars and over 25 resource documents. One of the Center’s most popular written resources has been a multicultural calendar, which has helped PTAs understand and celebrate holidays from different cultures for the last three years.

In 2019, the Center for Family Engagement launched “Notes from the Backpack” to provide families with evidence-based strategies for supporting their children’s learning and development in a fun and engaging format.



Episodes help families address common issues they face in partnering with their child's school, including supporting children's academic growth, partnering with teachers and principals and navigating transitions.

The podcast has also introduced listeners to key issues in education policy, including school funding, teacher diversity and retention, approaches to discipline and more. The show has welcomed many notable guests, featuring former Secretary of Education John King, New York Times bestselling author Kwame Alexander and celebrity chef Duff Goldman.

Notes from the Backpack has published 71 episodes and has over 100,000 downloads!

Top 5 Episodes

1. What is Social Emotional Learning Anyway?
2. Social Media & Cyberbullying 101
3. Back to School with the CDC
4. Middle School: What Every Parent Should Know
5. Supporting Students of Color

The Center for Family Engagement also developed the video series "10 Minutes to PTA the Transformative Way" to offer family engagement tips and strategies directly to PTA leaders.

The series' 22 episodes have highlighted approaches that integrate PTA's family engagement practices into broader educational issues and showcased strategies for creating more inclusive PTAs.

Empowering PTA Leaders in Transformative Family Engagement

Focusing on a grassroots approach, the Center for Family Engagement empowers PTA leaders to shift their family engagement practices from traditional to transformative. Through grant programs and a fellowship

model, the Center has distributed more than \$100,000 across its 88 awards to support these efforts.

The Center for Family Engagement's fellowship program launched in 2018 to identify leaders who could offer an on-the-ground perspective and become ambassadors for more equity- and impact-centered approaches to family engagement. This cohort co-created the Center's "4 I's" framework to help PTAs be more inclusive, individualized, integrated and impactful in their approach to partnering with families. The following year's cohorts have taken on specific themes in their work, including diversity, equity and inclusion and whole child development.

Over the years, the fellows have initiated local progress as influencers, researchers and ambassadors. Some examples include:

- ▶ Organizing and launching district family engagement committees.
- ▶ Partnering with unions to survey parents and creating follow up plans of action.
- ▶ Drafting family engagement handbooks and materials that reflect transformative family engagement.
- ▶ Creating a racial equity programming model for community-wide conversations.
- ▶ Hosting a statewide leadership development summit.

"The fellowship has meant the world to me. I learned so much about DEI, but also about myself. I appreciate being a part of this cohort and will always value this experience. This project really tapped into my passion as an advocate and my belief of intentional growth and development."

Tiffany Foster, PTA Leader, North Carolina

The Center for Family Engagement has also launched several grant programs that have empowered PTA leaders to listen to and learn from underrepresented families in their

communities. The Center has often offered *challenge* grants, which pushed grantee PTAs to first listen to families about their family engagement experiences and needs, share that learning with their broader community and then develop plans responsive to what they learned from families and other constituents.

For example, the Center's diversity, equity and inclusion grants reached 40 PTAs across 17 states and inspired local PTA leaders to shift their own mindsets and take action. These leaders have driven their communities towards equity by:

- ▶ Advocating for the addition of a DEI position at the district level.
- ▶ Building partnerships with local organizations that serve underrepresented communities.
- ▶ Making their communications more accessible to families who spoke languages other than English.

Partnership has been at the heart of the Center for Family Engagement's approach, including among staff and volunteers. The Center is proud to have been able to collaborate with National PTA's Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Committee and its Family Engagement Committee, supporting them in creating new trainings and recognizing great work by PTAs across the country.

Influencing Family Engagement Research & Policy

The Center for Family Engagement works to ensure parents have a seat at the decision-making table. Leadership has participated in coalitions and convenings, contributed to written works and presented at conferences nationwide, all to advance the conversation around family-school partnerships and uplift parent's voice.

The Center has also conducted research to help bring parent's voice to discussions around important school issues ranging from school funding to parents' perceptions of how their school engages them. Additionally, the Center developed a report and suite of family-school communications platforms available and

prioritize technology solutions that will best serve families. Most recently, the Center for Family Engagement updated National PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, a tool used by state and local education agencies to strengthen family engagement to promote student success and well-being.

To date, the updated National Standards for Family-School Partnerships have been presented at:

- ▶ American Federation of Teachers TEACH Conference
- ▶ American Institutes of Research State Family Engagement Leaders Network meeting
- ▶ Community Schools Research to Practice Network meeting
- ▶ Institute for Educational Leadership Community Schools x Family Engagement Conference
- ▶ National Association of Elementary School Principals K-8 Conference
- ▶ National Association of Family, School, & Community Engagement Family Engagement Summit
- ▶ National Association of Federally Impacted Schools Advocacy Institute
- ▶ National Association of State Boards of Education Community of Practice
- ▶ National Center for Families Learning Conference
- ▶ National School Boards Association Advocacy Institute
- ▶ National School Public Relations Association Leaders Learn
- ▶ Partners for Rural Impact Rural Summit
- ▶ Smithsonian Education Summit
- ▶ Statewide Family Engagement Centers meeting
- ▶ U.S. Department of Education family engagement cross-POC meeting

Throughout the revision process, the Center engaged leading researchers in the field and partnered with teachers' unions, principal and superintendent associations and other nonprofits to help shape a renewed effort to enhance family-school partnerships.

The process culminated in four main launch events, a...

1. state PTA leader training,
2. [virtual townhall](#) on National Parent Involvement Day,
3. briefing on Capitol Hill and
4. [five-part webinar series](#) for school, district and PTA leaders.

These events helped National PTA reach and educate thousands of practitioners and families on the updated PTA National Standards.

Maximizing Long Term Impact and Sustainability

The Center for Family Engagement maximizes its impact by focusing on systemic change within and outside of PTA. When National PTA joined a cohort of nonprofit organizations working to advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), the Center played a leading role helping National PTA strengthen its approach.

Through this experience, the Center collaborated with PTA leaders in the field to develop National PTA's [guiding beliefs](#) related to DEI and a [rubric for local leaders](#) to implement best practices. Continuous improvement has been a priority of the Center, and the Center has worked closely with National PTA's Programs team to embed best practices into program resources, including a recent update to the Schools of Excellence program.

The Center for Family Engagement's work has been made possible by National PTA's millions of members, as well as key funding partners. Strategic partnerships have been a core component of the Center's reach and

effectiveness. The Center has raised over \$800,000 in external funding and cultivated relationships with nonprofits, researchers and other partners.

“We need to raise the bar, to level up parent and family engagement, and reimagine how our children can get the education they need and they deserve.”

Dr. Miguel Cardona, U.S. Secretary of Education

Looking Ahead

The Center for Family Engagement is proud of all that has been accomplished in its first five years. The Center has built a strong foundation to help live out its purpose to embed more transformative approaches to family engagement across the education system. The Center has also developed new and engaging resources, identified and supported champions within PTA, elevated parent's voice and helped PTA's ability to evolve and improve to sustain its impact.

The Center for Family Engagement is poised to continue many of these efforts, as well as expand in particularly successful areas. In the future, the Center will amplify its impact through more and deeper partnerships with educational system leaders and educators, helping proverbially “put the T in PTA.” In particular, the Center looks forward to bringing the resources and champions from its first five years—as well as new evidence-informed practices—to new audiences working in state education agencies, school districts, schools and classrooms.

The Center for Family Engagement is grateful to all PTAs and partners for these first five years and looks forward to continued collaboration in the next five years!

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