

National PTA[®]
Connect For Respect
Guide for PTA Leaders

Contents

Connect for Respect: Introduction	3
Bullying and School Climate	4
About Bullying.....	4
School Climate	3
Improving School Climate Through Family-School Partnerships	5
Build Your Connect for Respect Team	7
Working with Student Leaders	7
Recruit Other Team Members.....	8
Meet with School Leaders	9
Assess the School Climate	10
Gathering Resources	11
Engage Your School Community	12
Host a <i>Connect for Respect</i> Forum	12
Design Your Action Plan	13
Education and Empowerment Strategies	13
Environment Strategies	14
Policy Strategies	15
Gather Resources	16
Sustain Your Efforts	17
Measure Your Progress	17
Plan for Next Year	18

Connect for Respect: Introduction

Bullying is not an isolated problem—it reflects the larger school climate. That's why National PTA created *Connect for Respect*, or **C4R** for short, to help local PTAs partner with students, schools and families to build positive school climates full of healthy and supportive relationships.

Our approach:

Build a Connect for Respect team. Invite students, teachers, community members, and other parents to work collaboratively towards improving school climate.



Assess the school climate from the perspective of students, families and school personnel. Utilize existing tools and resources from your school.

Engage the school community at *Connect for Respect* forums, where students, families, school staff and community members come together to share their concerns and brainstorm solutions.



Develop an action plan to educate and empower family members and students, create safer and more supportive environments, and enact and enforce effective anti-bullying policies.

Empower students, family members and others to implement strategies that reflect the community's unique strengths, needs and existing school climate efforts.



This guide provides PTA leaders with the information you need to develop your *Connect for Respect* action plan. Throughout the guide, you will find links to turn-key tools and resources to further support and simplify your efforts.

Partnership with student leaders will be critical to your success.

Tips for working with student leaders are incorporated throughout this guide. Information for the student leaders themselves can be found in our companion guide, *Connect for Respect Student Leader Guide* at [PTA.org/C4R](https://pta.org/C4R).

Bullying and School Climate

About Bullying

According to StopBullying.gov, bullying is defined as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.” More than three million students are victims of bullying each year, and almost four million participate in it.

These power imbalances may involve age, physical strength, popularity or access to embarrassing information. Bullying includes making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, or excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Bullying is a serious concern. It can cause lasting harm to *all* of the children involved:

- **Children who bully others** are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, get into fights, receive criminal convictions and be abusive in their relationships into adulthood.
- **Children who are the targets of bullying** are more likely to experience depression, anxiety and decreased academic achievement. In very rare cases, bullied children may retaliate through violent measures, such as bringing a weapon to school.
- **Students who witness the bullying** are more likely to feel anxious or depressed, miss or skip school and use alcohol and drugs. (stopbullying.gov, n.d.)

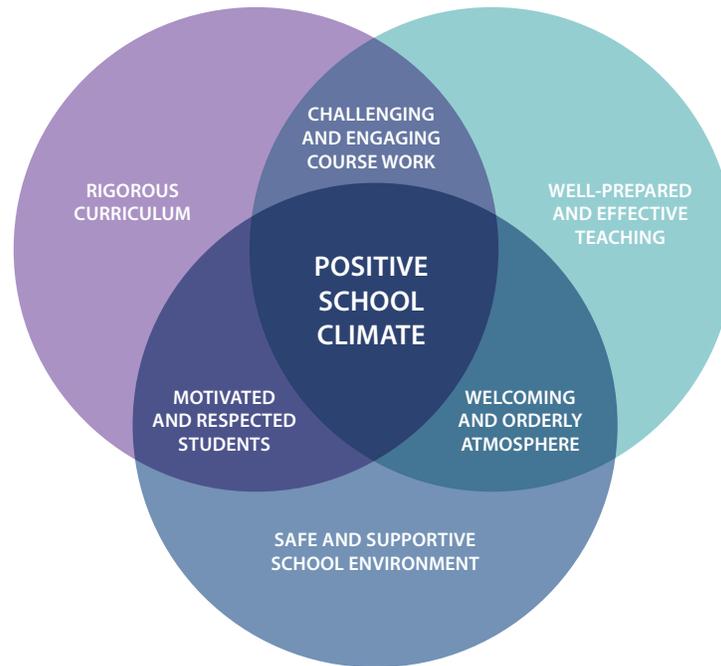
Positive school climates foster learning and decrease bullying behavior. In negative school climates, bullying is more common.

School Climate

Bullying is one indicator of the larger school climate—or what the National School Climate Council defines as the “quality and character of school life.” School climate includes elements such as safety, relationships, teaching strategies, and the physical environment (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013).

In schools with positive climates, everyone feels supported and respected. Students feel safe and want to be in class, families know they are welcome on campus and participate in their students’ learning, and teachers look forward to coming to work. All members of the school community share a sense of responsibility for ensuring that school buildings and grounds are well maintained.

Research has found that the most effective bullying prevention programs build a culture of respect throughout the school, rather than focusing narrowly on the perpetrators and victims of bullying behavior (Bradshaw & O’Brennan, 2013; National School Climate Center, 2014).



Credit: Positive School Climate illustration courtesy of The Whole Child Blog (Harris, 2013)

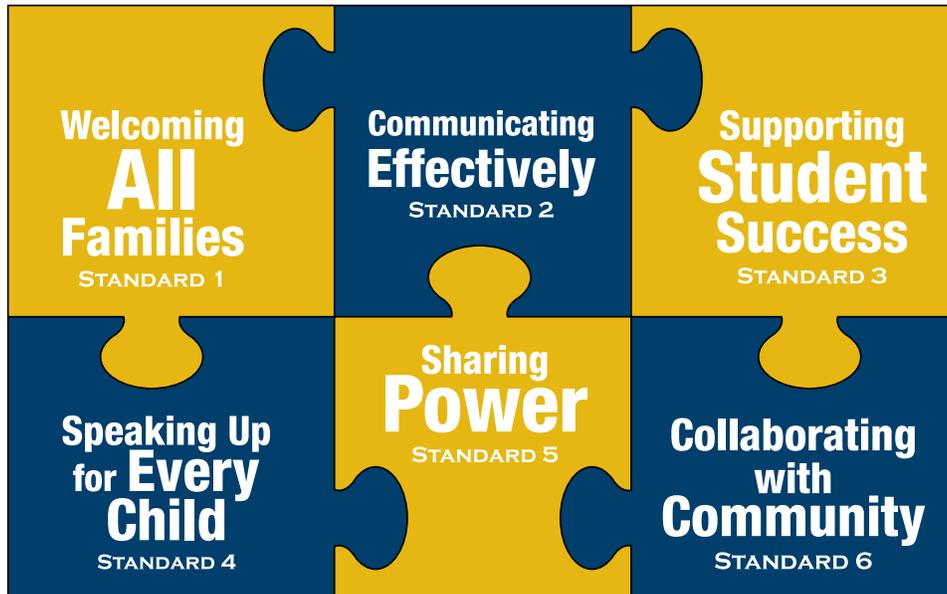
Improving School Climate Through Family-School Partnerships

Students with involved parents are more likely to attend school regularly, have better social skills, and experience greater success in school. Not coincidentally, strong family-school partnerships also translate into healthier school climates.

PTA worked with national experts to develop its National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. These standards reflect the most recent research about how parents, schools and communities can work together to support student achievement, and they are infused into everything we do.

**Families + Schools
= Student Success**

National Standards for Family-School Partnerships



Connect for Respect embodies these standards:

- You will **welcome all families** and encourage **effective, two-way communication** by inviting all members of the school community to voice their concerns about school climate through surveys and at a *Connect for Respect* forum.
- You will **collaborate with the community** by engaging a wide variety of partners in the solution.
- PTA leaders will **share power** by teaming with student leaders to develop and implement their action plan.
- You will not only **speak up for the safety and well-being of every child**—you will empower students to stand up for themselves and their peers.
- As you create socially supportive school cultures, you will help to create environments that **support every student’s long-term success**.

For more information about PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, including an implementation guide and assessment forms, visit the National PTA website: [PTA.org/programs](https://www.pta.org/programs).

Build Your *Connect for Respect* Team

School climate affects everyone. It has the potential to attract people who may not have been previously involved with PTA, making this an excellent opportunity to reach beyond your existing circle of volunteers.

Successful teams will include a diverse group of student leaders, parents, school personnel, and community members.

Working with Student Leaders

Students are on the “front lines” of school climate, and they must be at the forefront of your C4R efforts. You will need more than just a few student representatives on your team—you need a critical mass of committed, engaged student leaders who will take ownership of the program with your support and encouragement.



Engage student leaders from nearby middle schools and high schools as peer mentors to younger students at feeder schools.

An existing leadership group, such as the student council, may be an obvious place to start. However, be sure that the students on your planning and action teams are diverse and represent a variety of social groups within the school.

The following are some tips to make your work with student leaders rewarding for all:

- **Understand what motivates student leaders.** Take some time to get to know them—why are they interested in this project, what are their goals for the future, and how can you help those two things work together?
- **Guide, don't decide.** Instead of making decisions *for* students, act as a sounding board to support their own critical thinking. Then, help students reflect on the decisions they have made, especially those with less-than-positive outcomes.
- **Offer your knowledge and experience.** Share resources and tools that have worked well for you in the past, as well as personal experiences that may help students keep things in perspective and persevere when they hit a snag.

Students are critical members of your *Connect for Respect* team.

Working with Student Leaders, continued

- **Serve as a liaison with the school administration.** Help students understand the school's perspective, rules and guidelines. Be their advocate if students are struggling to be heard.
- **Model respect.** Students will look to you to set the tone. In *all* interactions—with student leaders, fellow PTA leaders, and the school administration—communicate respectfully, welcome all perspectives and follow through on your commitments.
- **Provide encouragement.** Show students that you believe in their abilities, help them set and achieve goals, and encourage them to challenge themselves. Find ways to recognize their accomplishments—this will keep students engaged and help to attract future leaders.

Recruit Other Team Members

In addition to student leaders, your team will include parents, school personnel and community members.

- **Parents.** Ask the school staff to suggest family members who might be looking for ways to get more involved, and have your board members extend personal invitations. Make meeting announcements as accessible as possible and consider posting on social media as well as in the school office.
- **School Personnel.** It is critical to involve the school's principal, teachers and counselors in planning and implementing your strategy, to be sure it is compatible with any existing school climate initiatives. Consider engaging other staff, as well. Secretaries, nurses, janitors, librarians, media specialists and cafeteria workers are additional "eyes and ears" around the school building who may have important information to share.
- **Community Members.** The culture that contributes to a positive school climate doesn't exist in a vacuum. Consider reaching out to those who might not typically be involved in your PTA's activities. You may find new volunteers, fundraising opportunities, and helpful insights from others such as:
 - School resource officers
 - School board members
 - Local business leaders
 - Community youth workers
 - Media representatives
 - Local business owners

Meet with School Leaders

The goal of *Connect for Respect* is to complement, not compete with existing school climate efforts. Early in the process, schedule a meeting with school leaders to share the *Connect for Respect* approach and get an accurate picture of what is already in place at the school in the areas of bullying prevention and school climate. This might include:

- Data (e.g., about bullying incidents or student/parent perceptions of school climate)
- Policies
- Curriculum (e.g., PBIS, Olweus)
- School-wide programs (e.g., Character Counts)

It will also be important to understand how each of the above elements are being communicated to parents and students. How can students, parents and PTA leaders best support their efforts?

Student Empowerment Opportunity

Work with student leaders to prepare a list of questions that they can ask school leaders during the meeting.



Assess the School Climate

In order to fully understand the existing school climate, you will likely need to supplement the information available from the school administration. Successful *Connect for Respect* teams will explore bullying and school climate from as many different perspectives as possible, including students, parents and school staff.

According to the National School Climate Center, in order to accurately measure the current school climate, you will want to explore the following areas:

- **SAFETY**

- Does the school have clearly communicated rules and policies against physical violence (hitting, pushing, etc.) and verbal abuse (insulting, teasing, etc.)?
- Do the students feel safe from physical harm at their school?
- Do students feel safe from verbal harassment and social exclusion?
- Is the school building physically safe (cleanliness, repairs made promptly, etc.)?

- **LEARNING**

- Do students and teachers have supportive relationships that nurture growth and learning?
- Are subjects explored beyond academic context to include developing social skills such as conflict resolution and civic engagement?
- Are the school's facilities (computers, supplies, etc.) up to par?

- **SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

- Do the adults in the school demonstrate respectful and positive relationships with each other?
- Do the students feel that they have peers or friends who they can trust?
- Are differences (race, gender, culture, etc.) respected?
(National School Climate Center, 2014)

Gathering Feedback

Your team can gather this information in whatever ways are most effective for your school community. Some possibilities include:

- Online surveys via email (e.g., SurveyMonkey)
- Print surveys
- Interviews
- Focus groups



Find sample surveys for students, parents and school staff in the National PTA Connect for Respect Online Toolkit at PTA.org/C4R.

Student Empowerment Opportunity

Student leaders can design distribution methods for the student survey. What survey methods and incentives will motivate their peers to participate?



Determine whether your school district may require active parent consent prior to distributing surveys. Ensure student privacy by keeping responses anonymous.

Resource Links

For more in-depth information and tools to help you assess your school climate, explore these National PTA partner resources:

- **Welcoming Schools Student School Climate Survey**
<http://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/student-school-climate-survey>
- **Not In Our School: Sample Student Questions**
<http://www.niot.org/nios/quickstart>
- **StopBullying.gov Landscape Assessment (in the Community Action Toolkit)**
<http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/in-the-community/community-action-planning/community-action-toolkit.pdf>

Engage Your School Community

Host a *Connect for Respect* Forum

After gathering some information about your school climate, you will further engage the school community through a *Connect for Respect* forum. This forum is an opportunity for your team to share what you have learned so far, attract more support and brainstorm strategies that will make up your action plan.



This forum may bring out personal anecdotes related to bullying incidents. Be supportive and encouraging, but also keep in mind that the focus should be towards school-wide solutions. Individual incidents should be addressed with school personnel.



Every *Connect for Respect* forum will be different because each community is unique. Yours might be a small gathering of 10 or 15 people, or a large public forum with as many as 200. It could be a town-hall style discussion, or a roll-up-your-sleeves workshop. The important thing is that it meets your community's needs and that all constituents (students, family members, school staff, and community members) are represented.

See sample agenda on PTA.org/C4R.

Student Empowerment Opportunity

Encourage students to take a prominent role in planning, promoting, hosting and facilitating your *Connect for Respect* forum. Offer your ideas, resources, experience and guidance along the way.

Explore the Larger Community

Be sure to consider community attributes that may affect what is happening on campus. Questions to stimulate discussion:

- How do adults in your community show respect and support for youth?
- What incidents have occurred recently in the community that may affect adults' perceptions about youth?
- Do youth have safe places to gather after school and on weekends?
- Do adults intervene when they see bullying happen in the community?

- Does the community offer programs to address youth violence (including gang violence)?
- What other youth development programs exist in your community (e.g., YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs)? (National School Climate Center, 2014; stopbullying.gov, 2014)

For an example of how to engage student leaders in collecting information about their community, see: **Not In Our School: Documenting Communities Through Interviews and Film** (<http://www.niot.org/nios/lesson/activity-guide-documenting-communities-through-interviews-and-film>).

Design Your Action Plan

The brainstorming that takes place at your *Connect for Respect* forum will provide the basis for an action plan that reflects your school's unique strengths and needs.

Your action plan might include efforts to educate and empower your school community, improve the school environment, change policy, or a combination of all three.

Education and Empowerment Strategies

You may want to select this strategy if your assessment process revealed that members of the school community do not know much about school climate or bullying prevention. If your school has not done much to build awareness around the issue, this may be a good starting point.



THE END GOAL:

Members of your school community are aware of the impact of bullying and school climate. Students, parents and school staff are motivated to create change and excited about what they can accomplish together. Community members are fully informed about the problem and what they can do to make a difference.

THE STRATEGIES:

Education and empowerment strategies often work best when combined, stimulating the desire for change *and* a basis for informed action.

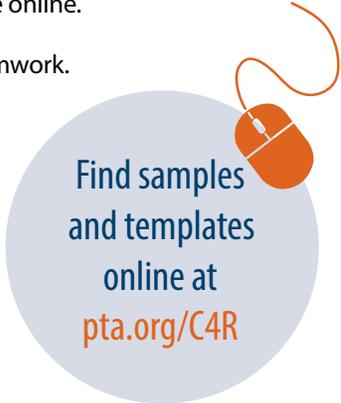
- **Invite a local bullying prevention specialist to present** at a school-wide meeting for school personnel, families and students. Topics could include: current school policies, bullying prevention programs and curriculum, what families can do to reinforce bullying prevention messages, and how to respond when bullying occurs. A consistent response from adults at school, at home and in the community sends a clear message that this behavior will not be tolerated. (Welcoming Schools trainers in your area: <http://www.welcomingschools.org/experts-in-your-area/>).
- **Support student leaders** in developing a presentation for younger students about standing up to bullying behavior. There are many existing resources out there to help you create a presentation, or you can get creative and develop your own skit. (See the C4R Student Leaders Guide at PTA.org/C4R for more information).

Student Empowerment Opportunity

Use probing questions to guide students through their planning process. Create a plan that all feel ownership of and can commit to implementing.

Education and Empowerment Strategies, continued

- **Encourage student leaders** to conduct a campaign to stop cyberbullying. They might start by identifying the apps that are “hot” right now and how they are being (or could be) used to bully. With your help, student leaders can reach out to their peers with messages about positive, respectful social media use, while educating parents about how to keep their youth safe online.
- **Host a family fun night** with games that teach the qualities of good character and teamwork.
- **Sponsor a poster or video contest** with the theme, “What does respect mean to me?” Engage a diverse panel of students to choose the winners. Fill the hallways with the entries or post them on the school website.
- **Distribute tip sheets** for parents about your school’s bullying prevention programs and policies and how families can be supportive. In your meetings with school leaders, work to establish ways that existing programs and policies can be supported by parents at home.



Find samples
and templates
online at
pta.org/C4R

Environment Strategies

You may want to select this strategy if your assessment process revealed that environmental factors such as poorly supervised areas and deteriorating school facilities contributed to overall poor school climate.

THE END GOAL:

When parents and students enter the school building, they are warmly welcomed by staff. Students and members of the school community share a sense of ownership for its care and maintenance. As a result, school buildings, facilities and grounds are safe, well maintained and full of healthy peer relationships.



THE STRATEGIES:

- **Ask student leaders to map bullying “hot spots”** or places in or around the school where bullying is most likely to occur. For inspiration, show students this video from Not In Our School: <http://www.niot.org/nios-video/students-map-bully-zones-create-safer-school>. Are areas such as the cafeteria or bus stop adequately supervised? Work with the school administration (and caring community members) to increase adult supervision in those areas.
- **Create inspirational posters** and fliers promoting positive school climate and standing up for your peers in visible locations. Engage students in the campaign.
- **Brainstorm more ways** to create a welcoming environment for those entering the school. (Are students greeted warmly? What is the attitude of administrative staff toward visitors?)
- **Help students feel more invested** in their surroundings and build peer relationships by supporting a student-led effort to improve the campus (e.g, pick up trash and litter, paint a mural, plant flowers, etc.).

Policy Strategies

You may want to select this strategy if your assessment process revealed outdated or insufficient school policies regarding bullying and school climate. Be sure to verify that policies are informed by current best practices.

THE END GOAL:

Your school has a set of evidence-based policies in place for how members of the school community will treat one another and how incidents of bullying behavior will be addressed. These policies are enforced consistently and clearly communicated to all school members. Parents understand how they can support these policies from home.



THE STRATEGIES:

- **Identify and eliminate** any bullying prevention policies that do not employ current best practices. Work with a team of student and school leaders to make these changes and identify more effective guidelines. Ineffective policies include “zero tolerance” or the use of peer mediation to address bullying. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/educate/misdirections-in-prevention.pdf>. Review some common misdirections in bullying prevention, as compiled by stopbullying.gov: Together, create more effective guidelines.
- **Establish a pledge.** Partner with your school and student leaders to develop and promote a simple school-wide “pledge” regarding bullying. For a sample student pledge, see Stop Bullying Speak Up: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/toolkits/pdf/Pacer-Unite-Against-Bullying-School-Event-Planning-Guide.pdf>. Students may also define what respect means to them, and use their input to design the pledge.
- **Advocate with the school** to institute a peer advocacy program, like this one developed by PACER: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/toolkits/pdf/PeerAdvocacyGuide.pdf>.
- **Review some of the National School Climate Center's standards** for school climate improvement to help inform your action plan. National School Climate Center's standards on school improvement: <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-standards.pdf>.
- **Become familiar with your state's laws** regarding bullying. These laws will inform the policies your school may implement. State laws regarding bullying can be found on StopBullying.gov: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/index.html>.

Find program and action planning tools to help you implement any of these strategies in National PTA's digital *Connect for Respect* toolkit at PTA.org/C4R.

Gather Resources

Most PTAs have a limited budget and must plan carefully to achieve their goals. Ideally, your PTA's annual budget will already include funds for *Connect for Respect*. If that's not the case this year, don't worry! You can accomplish a lot with a small budget, with the help of volunteers, and by collaborating with your community.

The resources you need will depend on your unique action plan. Find a budget planning worksheet, fundraising and acknowledgment tools at [PTA.org/C4R](https://pta.org/C4R).

Don't hesitate to ask for support—including cash or in-kind donations—from area businesses. Visit [PTA.org/C4R](https://pta.org/C4R) for a sample letter to acknowledge donations for tax purposes. Youth-friendly businesses are great places to start. Some possibilities include:

- Restaurants or coffee shops where older youth gather after school
- Retail stores aimed at a youth audience, including clothing, accessories, video games or bike/skate shops
- Arcades, miniature golf courses or “family fun centers”
- Youth sports leagues, facilities, gyms or supply stores

Student Empowerment Opportunity

Students can be very effective at gathering resources. Consider sending teams of student ambassadors into the community to request support.

Sustain Your Efforts

School climate improvement requires a sustained commitment. Once you have created interest and collaboration around *Connect for Respect* and you have put your action plan in motion, your challenge will be to keep this issue top-of-mind in the months and years to come.

Measure Your Progress

Measuring your progress and publicizing the results will help keep your school community engaged. Your evaluation plan might include some or all of the following questions:

- **How have student, parent, school personnel and community members' perceptions changed as a result of your activities?**

To answer this question, redeploy your original assessment strategies to compare how perceptions about bullying and school climate have evolved since your *Connect for Respect* program began.

- **How satisfied were participants with events or activities?**

A simple satisfaction survey can help your planning team gather more information about how attendees felt about specific activities or events. Did they enjoy the activities and understand their connection to school climate and bullying prevention? Do they feel the information provided was useful? Will they come to another *Connect for Respect* event?

- **What policy or environmental changes occurred at school as a result of your initiatives?**

Be sure to track any and all changes that occurred. This information can be used in funding requests and as inspiration for even greater changes in the future.

Once you have gathered as much information as you can, hold a debriefing meeting with your planning team and plan to bring all of this information to next year's *Connect for Respect* forum. Based on what you were able to accomplish this year, how might your goals change for next year, and how might you improve your program's effectiveness?

Student Empowerment Opportunity

Be sure to include student leaders in this very important program activity! Help them brainstorm different ways to measure what they have accomplished.

Plan for Next Year

It's never too early to begin planning for next year's *Connect for Respect* initiative! Before the school year ends, make sure you have done the following:

- Track the budget amount and number of volunteer hours required for *Connect for Respect* to help next year's chairperson plan realistically.
- Make sure *Connect for Respect* is included as a line item in your PTA's budget for next school year.
- Consider selecting a tentative date for next year's community forum and reserving the space on the school's calendar.
- Consider creating a folder or binder with all program information (samples of all tools and materials used, number of volunteers and hours needed, budget, etc.) for next year's chairperson. Encourage student leaders to do the same.

Begin the path to Excellence

Your *Connect for Respect* program can be an excellent starting point for becoming a National PTA School of Excellence. School of Excellence is a recognition program that supports and celebrates partnerships between PTA and schools to enrich the educational experience and overall well-being for all students.

If your school is not already participating in the School of Excellence program, the work you have done this year for *Connect for Respect* has laid important groundwork that may contribute to a successful application. Find more information at <http://PTA.org/excellence>.

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Go online. Connect for Respect. PTA.org/C4R is your one-stop shop for tools, links, and other helpful items to get your C4R project up and running.



Tweet #PTAC4R to connect with other *Connect for Respect* teams across the country.

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