

Grafenwoehr Elementary PTA, Dept. of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), APO, AE, Germany

With over 100 new students and three added classrooms, Grafenwoehr Elementary School (GES) PTA embarked on their path to renew their School of Excellence designation during the 2015-2016 school year with a focus on making sure all families felt welcomed, supported, engaged and connected to their PTA and school community.

The school increased the use of student-led conferences this year, making them a part of the traditional parent-conference conversation and letting them show their parents what they're learning in class. PTA leaders worked closely with the GES Student Council to gain input from the student body and involve them in the decision-making process.

The PTA also strengthened its community relationships by working closely with the German government and its local battalion, community and spouses club and Armed Forces Network.

College and Career Readiness

Grafenwoehr Elementary PTA hosted several family events that helped to strengthen connections among families and teachers and provided essential information to parents on how to support the implementation of the new College and Career Readiness curriculum.

"Events like Family Math Night gave [parents] an opportunity to experience and ask questions about some of the new methods that their kids are experiencing in the classroom," reported Grafenwoehr PTA leaders.

Literacy

The PTA hosted the Read Across America program and the annual Spelling Bee, which resulted in a student earning 46th place in the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Arts Education

There were a record number of Reflections entries and the PTA paired a "Reflections Night" with a General Membership Meeting so that students could experiment with dance, art and music while their parents participated in the business of the organization.

Healthy Lifestyles

Grafenwoehr Elementary PTA hosted "Try Day Friday" and "Try it if you Dare" for Halloween. Students and families sampled fresh, healthy foods and took home recipes for later. They also hosted Just Dance Family Dance Night, Family Zumba Night and Family Fun Runs. In addition, throughout the year, the PTA encouraged a Healthy Body Building Pledge, which followed the Army Fitness Triad and encouraged families to get enough sleep, fun exercise and servings of fruits and veggies each day.

Advocacy

The PTA led the charge to address parent and faculty input regarding bus safety, school parking issues, the availability of field trips, facility maintenance issues and the purchase of new technology for their classrooms. The school also hosted a number of small group gatherings with the District Superintendent and the Director of DoDEA Europe that allowed parents to give their feedback on how the school is doing across all areas.

Centennial Campus Magnet Middle School PTSA, Raleigh, N.C.

Centennial Campus Magnet Middle School PTSA leaders paved the way to lay the foundation for an effective family-school partnership with a new principal in the 2015-2016 school year.

Valuing the Diversity of the School Community

Centennial PTSA worked to welcome all families by focusing on intentional and sustained outreach to two traditionally under-represented groups of parents: Hispanic families, and dads and other male role models.

Centennial PTSA established a "Pack Men" group, which became an All Pro Dads chapter and hosted monthly All Pro Dad breakfasts for a group of 20 at-risk boys, many of whom don't have positive male role models at home. The male volunteers developed relationships with each other and school staff to support student success by empowering, encouraging and inspiring the boys to make better choices, avoid negative behaviors and serve their community.

The PTSA reached out to Hispanic families by hosting a family engagement event at a neighborhood community center. They partnered with the school's Student Services Team and Wake County Public Schools' Parent Academies to present two workshops for families in Spanish: Dealing with Peer Pressure in Middle School and Test Taking and Anxiety.

Supporting Student Success And Speaking Up for Every Child

Centennial PTSA provided parent education workshops at their annual Family Summit on underage drinking, internet safety, test taking and anxiety and Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset. They also hosted a Special Education Summit to connect families to the school's special programs teachers and Wake County Public Schools' Special Education Services team.

The PTSA participated in North Carolina PTA's Elected Officials Go to School program to connect local School Board Representative and General Assembly members to families and students.

Parents served on the School Improvement Plan Team, the Health and Wellness Committee and a team of guidance counselors, a social worker and school psychologist to discuss student equity issues and how to bridge the achievement gap.

One of the Centennial PTSA leaders and an eighth grade student accompanied the school guidance counselor to the White House in February 2016 to participate in Michelle Obama's Reach Higher initiative.

Healthy Lifestyles

Centennial PTSA partnered with Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina to host a school food pantry, which ultimately served an average of over 65 people per month.

The PTSA also partnered with the Southeast United Dairy Industry Association to provide families and students with information on eating better and being active. In fact, the school received a Fuel Up to Play 60 grant to fund its 100 Mile Club challenge—challenging students to walk 100 miles during the second semester—and school food pantry program.

Finally, the PTSA partnered with the North Carolina State Wellness Corp to connect college athletes to volunteer opportunities at the school. The athletes coached games, gave college tours and built relationships with at-risk youth.

New Century Technology High School PTSA, Huntsville, Ala.

A first-time recipient of the School of Excellence designation, New Century Technology High School (NCTHS) PTSA focused their family and community engagement efforts on communicating effectively to empower families to support student success.

The PTSA co-hosted the NCTHS orientation and fair for prospective eighth grade students. They expanded their communications channels, using a new website, newsletter, text messages and social media accounts to share information about PTSA and school programs, events and news.

NCTHS PTSA designed a program called Success by the Slice to support student success by presenting educational seminars focused on life skills during students' lunch period—with free pizza—to foster a more welcoming environment. Parents and teachers were also invited and various guest speakers led the popular sessions on topics such as how to select a college and interview techniques.

The PTSA also won a \$5,000 Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant to support the NCTHS robotics team, which did not have up-to-date lab equipment. The grant allowed the team to develop a plan that would provide the tools and work stations that would help students learn more and compete at a higher level.

Giving Parents a Voice in School Policies And Improvements

The PTSA started a new initiative to strengthen family-school partnerships—Coffee with the Principal. Every other month, breakfast and coffee were served as the principal answered questions from 20 to 30 parents.

The NCTHS PTSA Board also advocated for the safety of all students, teachers and families crossing the railroad tracks within viewing distance of the doors to the school. The PTSA board members were alarmed the crossing did not have safety arms that are lowered when the trains pass. The board continues to advocate to city officials to secure railroad arms for the safety of the students and families.