

# 1. Maple West Elementary PTA

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Maple West Elementary Schools stated objective has been to improve education by creating a culture and climate that welcomes all families. After receiving our Roadmap to Excellence, our first step was to have a meeting with our PTA co-presidents, school principal and School of Excellence chairperson to discuss the needs of English Language Learner (ELL) families in our school. The outcome of the meeting was that our schools ELL teacher was identified as potential liaison between the PTA and the school administration as a way to convey information to ELL families.

Our next step was to address the issue at our November PTA meeting and ask our membership to generate ideas about how to make our PTA more inclusive to ELL families. The PTA membership made the following recommendations: 1) investigate having PTA flyers and documents translated for ELL families; 2) ask the ELL teacher to advise families verbally about upcoming PTA events during phone calls and conferences; 3) have the principal place signs in multiple languages in our schools common areas; 4) have the PTA executive board discuss the issue of the inclusion of ELL families with all event chairs; and 5) have our PTA co-President share information on the PTA Facebook page about providing translation and interpretation services 6) sponsor executive board members to attend the New York State PTA conference to learn more about statewide advocacy and communicate the information to all members.

From December through May, the principal, the ELL teacher, the PTA executive board and co-Presidents implemented all of the ideas suggested by the membership at our November meeting. Information about the initiatives, including translation services, was shared on PTA and official school social media accounts. Our principal also shared the information in direct emails to parents and encouraged parents to contact him or their child's teacher with further questions. Signs were placed around the school identifying common areas in the languages spoken by Maple West ELL families. PTA event chairpersons and the principal also worked with the ELL teacher to share information with families about upcoming PTA family events. The PTA also sponsored four representative from the Executive Board to attend the New York State PTA conference so that they could advise PTA members about statewide advocacy efforts around education and how they could become involved at the local level.

The result was an overwhelming increase in family engagement of both ELL and non-ELL families at Maple West. Our biggest success was our Fun Run and Wellness Expo, an event in June that ran throughout the school day and in the evening. Nearly 90% of parents registered their child for the Fun Run and over 100 parents attended and/or volunteered at the Fun Run during the school day. Additionally, almost 800 parents, students and siblings came to our school in the evening for a Family Fun Run and Wellness Expo. At the Expo, PTA hosted community organizations and business such as the YMCA, a local youth action group, cultural organizations, wellness providers, martial arts teachers and more. Families were invited to learn about healthy cooking, physical exercise and new cultures. We also hosted a local author at the event to read to families a book about karate and the virtues of integrity, self-control and perseverance. Information was also provided to families about local resources for children wishing to learn a new language. Local vendors provided information to families so that their children could learn

improve their health, wellness and cultural knowledge in various after-school activities. The event was sponsored by 10 local businesses, which partnered with Maple West PTA to provide free Fun Run t-shirts and water bottles for every child, teacher and staff member at Maple West. Our building principal advised us that the Fun Run and Wellness Expo was the most highly attended event in our schools 50-year history!

Maple West PTA is proud to have an active and engaged membership who committed throughout this school year to improve family engagement and childrens education by creating an environment that is welcoming to all families. We believe that our school is truly a School of Excellence.

## 2. Laurens Middle School PTA

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In the fall of 2017, Laurens Middle School began a journey to become a nationally recognized PTA School of Excellence. As we began this process, we had no idea what to expect. In fact, we had only previously converted from a PTO to a PTSA a year earlier. Nonetheless, we started the process this past September with the baseline survey. Along with issuing the survey, we formed the Laurens Middle School of Excellence committee. The School of Excellence committee worked together, evaluated our survey data, and concluded that our area of focus for the year would be to “create a culture and climate that welcomes all families.” We used our roadmap to set out on our journey, focused on our overall objective, and set goals. The road map was extremely helpful in setting a direction for our process. A particular area of interest to our committee was the parent resource center. This area was one of three weak areas in our baseline survey. We were thrilled to complete each task on our road map this year; however, we are most excited about the resource center. The committee felt the resource center would be one way in which to aid in creating a culture and climate that welcomes all families. It would also help us effectively communicate with families and collaborate with other organizations in the community to provide needed resources to build our family and school community. The resource center is the most visible project from our PTA School of Excellence process and provides the most positive distinction of the three main features we accomplished this year. We were pleased to complete this task ahead of our set deadline in order to have it available as quickly as possible to our stakeholders.

In creating our parent resource center, our committee had several issues to consider. Our first question involved space and visibility. While there was not a room we could dedicate solely to this project, we considered a variety of options including a wall in our conference room, the hallway near our guidance office, and other high-traffic areas of our school. None of those places seemed to suit what we were trying to achieve. An advantage of our nearly 65 year-old building is a large lobby area. With some minor adjusting of furniture, we were able to provide ample space for the center right outside our main office where parents sit and wait for meetings and appointments and where students, guests, and visitors pass most frequently. The placement allowed the highest visibility as well as room to expand as necessary.

Our other issues centered on financing and material needed for the center. We were able to set aside money from a school fundraiser and found a rack large enough that displayed hard copy resources that we felt were pertinent to our families and community. Our PTA School of Excellence committee discussed and decided on three categories of information that were essential to include. The first category was significant school and district information. These items included the school calendars, information about state testing, information about registration and more. Our second category was community information. This included information about programs offered by local organizations that partner with our school. Information such as after school care, summer camps, and local offerings from colleges and universities were included. The last category of resources in our center concerned social, legal, and mental health issues. Examples of these resources included pamphlets about bullying and social norms. Our guidance counselor and other school administrators approved everything that was included in our

resource center. Our office staff worked diligently to keep the resource center up-to-date and stocked with timely and essential information. The School of Excellence committee, PTSA, local organizations, and school administration also monitored the resource center as well.

In the short time the center has been open, it has made a significant contribution to the atmosphere of our school by fostering better communication with our parents and visitors. Our office staff is able to help show parents where to find information they are asking for immediately upon entering our building. Additionally, teachers have utilized the resource center to point parents to resources for their students on different topics as well as overall community and district resources. Overall, it has been a huge success. We have to replenish our resources frequently! Our families and community have taken notice as well. When we completed our baseline survey back in September, we scored frequently on the question regarding communication with parents. In our final survey, the majority of respondents chose always concerning this question. Our new resource center has played a huge role in that.

Our overall objective during this process was to increase the strength of our family-school partnerships. At Laurens Middle School, we want to create a culture and climate that welcomes all families and that gives multiple avenues for families to access information about their child's education. Although we met all of the goals we set as a School of Excellence committee, we are most proud of our resource center. It has already visibly helped, and will continue to help, families for coming school years. Through our goals and objectives in our action plan, we feel as though our school has grown toward greater excellence this school year. Laurens Middle School is a newly formed PTSA and feel as though we have made marked improvements in our family-school partnerships through going through this process, receiving feedback from our families and community, and instituting new initiatives that strengthened our welcoming environment for all of our families. We will continue to strive to foster these same principles in years to come.

### 3. Boggess Elementary PTA

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The primary reason for our PTA to engage in the School of Excellence program is a decrease in parent volunteers and family participation at the school. Our hope was that by deploying the School of Excellence surveys, we could identify areas of improvement that could help boost volunteering and family involvement with the PTA and the school in general.

We - the PTA and school administration - felt that we were primarily facing two issues. The first is that our student population has dropped to around 570, decreasing about 100 students each of the past 3 years, a result of which has been a reduced number of available parents. Additionally, the percentage of students or families where a language other than English is spoken at home has increased relative to the overall population. With approximately 167 students (~30% of student population), living in homes where other languages were spoken (Vietnamese, Urdu, Arabic, Spanish, Gujarati, Mandarin, Hindi, Panjabi, Telugu,...)

Based on the initial survey results, we targeted 'Our school translates communications and provides interpreters as needed' as an area for improvement, as the majority of responses (52%) were 'Unknown'. We felt that with such a large population of parents and students that may be ESL (or in the case of parents, non-English speaking), that it was necessary to make an extra effort to communicate with these families and make sure that they knew that translation services were offered by Boggess Elementary (and Plano I.S.D.) as well as implementing translation capabilities from the PTA as well.

What we did: Since translation services are already provided by Plano I.S.D. on an as-needed basis, our overall goal was to increase the awareness of Boggess parents and families regarding the translation services available to them at any time they might be needed (online, during registration, parent teacher conferences, SpEd conferences, etc.) We worked with the ESL staff at the school to identify the languages utilized in the homes of Boggess students, and crafted a page that was sent home highlighting the translation services available from the school/district. We also added this page to the PTA website ([www.boggespta.org/Translation](http://www.boggespta.org/Translation)) and made sure that the PTA website hosting capabilities included a Google Translate widget, so that most of the content of our website could be translated by users.

We also promoted this information across the PTA social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and our PTA Email Newsletter (distributes to approx. 680 parent emails). The results of our efforts reflected in the final survey responses were encouraging. For the targeted question (Our school translates communications and provides interpreters as needed) we moved from a majority of responses of "Unknown" to a majority (48%) of "Always."

While we are pleased with the initial results, we know that we are still early on in this process. Our "translation communication" has only been in place for about four months, so we hope to continue and explore additional ways to help non-English speaking parents and families feel comfortable and welcomed by Boggess and the Boggess PTA.

The results of the comparison between the initial and final surveys have also pointed us to a few other areas where, while we are certainly not deficient, there is room for improvement (improved multicultural signage, reminders of where to find the school improvement plan, information about school transitions for fifth grade, etc.)