

1. Mark Twain Elementary PTA

"We Strive for Excellence!" was our new spirit wear slogan this year inspired by the school's mission statement. The words transformed blank t-shirt backs into walking billboards that foreshadowed the path that the school would experience over the next 180 days.

The Mark Twain Elementary School PTA serves the River Rafter, an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body with 35% English Learners and over 14 different home languages. Families seek enrollment in our long-standing Spanish dual language immersion program. We've also retained many favorite PTA traditions and have a recurring body of committed parents. But a spark in the summer of 2018 would also ignite some new ideas, which along with a supportive principal, would make for a really great year.

Our Journey to Excellence began after leaving the 33rd District's Spring Officer's training. Inspired by the day, our incoming President, Executive Vice President, and a yet to be elected Family Engagement Chairperson enjoyed a lively conversation in the car ride home and scratched out our new vision and 2018-19 goals.

Vision:

The PTA at Mark Twain Elementary will strive to be a stable organization that leads in engaging with and meeting the needs of all families regardless of the leadership or school make-up.

Goals:

- 1) Improve leadership and member training, planning and organization
- 2) Refresh traditional PTA programs and add new ideas
- 3) Expand funding sources and eliminate inefficient activities
- 4) Increase school and community engagement

Further summertime planning would uncover the perfect companion to help us reach our goals. We submitted our National PTA School of Excellence application and formed an Excellence Team including PTA members, our principal and student support services staff, district communications staff, and bilingual speakers. This cross-section of representation would allow us to align our plans most efficiently with the school and the district office. The baseline survey results indicated that our school community was generally pleased, but we should focus on improving education, do more with college and career readiness, and revise our communication strategy given 49% of responses were by a paper. The Excellence Team set a separate goal to see that 'always' is selected greater than 50% of the time for each question. Four questions would need to show improvement.

Our action plan would combine refreshed traditions and new activities to best serve our current families. Regarding college and career readiness, the school year started with pendants in the front office and some teachers displaying their college profile. Also, grade level readiness standards were shared at the fall Back to School Night. Then in mid-February, we kicked off our marketing campaign stating - It's NOT March Madness, It's March Readiness at Mark Twain! Paper flyers went home, social media posts and emails were distributed, and mentions were listed in our new digital PTA Newsletter all of which always included bilingual content. Highly engaging, visible posters were hung on the front of the school just in case families didn't catch the other communications. We constantly thought about Welcoming all Families and how to Communicate Effectively throughout the plan's execution.

Our first PTA College and Career Readiness Month launched in March with a combined Read Across America/Career Day. We invited parents to both read books and speak about their careers. In our usually female-heavy volunteer base, four new dads showed up and declared they would return again next year. We found a new way to engage our dads!

The second week of March was Spirit Week. We partnered with student support services who helped students write their future career plans on miniature squares that created a muraled billboard. The color-coded squares aligned current grade levels to a high school graduation year. Many students said this was the first time they thought about their graduation. We also kicked off a new weekly activity - College Wednesdays - when everyone at the school wears college gear. That same month, Career Dress Up day was on a Thursday, and who doesn't love to dress up? Well, 5th graders. But, the week ended with Parent Conferences that we promoted as Family Conference Day and encouraged families to have their child present to talk about what they've learned. We also shared the pta.org parent conference guide to help with preparation. Students were actively engaged and parents were being empowered to Support their Student's Success.

We held one of our biggest traditions re-themed as JOG-A-THON 2019: Run Toward Your Future at the end of March. Students wore college gear or a shirt expressing their desired career path. Those color-coded graduation years reappeared to remind students about their educational goal and beyond. And while the month's on-campus activities occurred, bilingual communications went home about district PSAT workshops, local resources and experiences including STEM Nights and science festivals, and college scholarships. And in our communication, our expanded school slogan appeared to remind everyone that 'We Are the River Rafters. We Strive for Excellence!' At the conclusion, College and Career Readiness Month was declared an annual event.

So much work went into all of our plans this year and we were not disappointed! 100% of the year-end survey questions reflected an increase in the 'always' rating and 95% of questions showed 'always' selected greater than 50% of the time. We moved the needle in every category and made significant leaps relative to Welcoming All Families ('always' up 5%-21%), Supporting Student Success ('always' up 5%-18%), Communicating Effectively ('always' up 8%-16%), and even gains in Speaking Up for Every Child ('always' up 6%-17%). We witnessed the highest levels of engagement with vocally thankful families, increased event attendance, and more, new volunteers. We even saw an 11% increase in the number of surveys submitted at year-end.

Overall, our Excellence Team is proud of what we accomplished this year with the School of Excellence Program and have encouraged other district schools to consider enrolling. With the groundwork laid, we will walk into 2019-20 solidly invested in the ongoing pursuit of a strong family-school partnership.

2. Norman Rockwell PTA

The key to this year's growth towards Norman Rockwell's School of Excellence status has been communication. We have diligently and intentionally implemented necessary steps to strengthen our family-school partnership by nurturing the relationship between the school and PTA. As you will see from reading this 'year in review,' our dedication to improving communication has paid off in more ways than we imagined back in October. Norman Rockwell PTA's role in strengthening our family-school partnership and focusing on improving education has created a positive impact on our school community by providing a deeper understanding of programs, educating parents on transitioning students between grade levels and communicating more consistently to reach all families where they are.

To kick off our year with an emphasis on communicating and welcoming families by representing multiple languages spoken in our building, PTA created 'Welcome' signs in eight different languages located at each entrance to grade level pods and outside of the building at each doorway. Several students were heard trying to pronounce 'welcome' and friends joined in by sharing how they say 'welcome' in their home language. Through the positive impact from the signs, we worked with the school to have the daily announcements start with 'good morning' in the language of the 5th grade student announcer. We aspire to inherit this morning greeting as a Rockwell tradition. The results of our work towards welcoming families with friendly signs reflects in the School of Excellence survey 24% indicated 'unknown' on the fall survey and only 9% of spring respondents were unfamiliar.

In addition to welcoming families in many languages, we worked on boosting awareness of using translators and providing interpreters. Every publication of the PTA weekly newsletter, the Beagle Bugle, provided an article on obtaining access to the phone translation services in the school office as well as a personal contact from our FACE (Family and Community Engagement) committee. The Special Education department used phone interpreters for IEP meetings. Again, the pre and post surveys revealed a 20% increase in parents having an awareness in this category.

To keep the momentum going for increased involvement and parent education, PTA continued to partner with the principal's 'Coffee with Mr. Clark'. This is a monthly meeting for families to discuss important topics with the principal in an open, casual Q & A format which makes it easy to be heard and provides two-way interaction towards a common understanding. At least 50 parents have attended this year and we hope to double attendance next year. To quantify the success of this program, survey results show 10-20% improvement from 'unknown' in fall vs spring.

With communication at the forefront of our focus this year, Norman Rockwell PTA celebrated a couple of firsts! For the first time, we were recognized by the Washington PTA with a Silver award of excellence for our participation in Outstanding Communication Strategy. This award recognizes local PTA's for their use of multiple forms of communication, from posters, newsletters, social media, and more, we connected with a broader audience of our community. We also reached 100% staff membership and bronze for general membership. Having 100% staff membership demonstrates our commitment to building a strong partnership between PTA and Norman Rockwell. Adding to that, obtaining an increase of memberships over last year while having a decrease of nearly 50 students is proof positive that PTA is engaged with and trusted by our families.

One final measurable for strengthening two-way communication is involving parents in planning for student transitions. PTA used the National PTA parent's guide to student success handbook to feature one grade level in our Beagle Bugle for two weeks each. The link to an overview of some of the key topics children learn in their English literacy and math classrooms was included. Each article presented a few activities families can do at home to support academic standards and ensure students meet core expectations. Before publishing the content, PTA met with teacher groups to review the data and ensure their grade level met standards and they would be available to discuss student progress with two-way communication. This includes collaboration with our Special Education cohort during guidance team decision of next steps, during evaluation feedback process, throughout the creation of the IEP as well annually when the IEP is reviewed. Survey results indicate a 23% improvement in 'unknown' responses; 16% increase in 'always'. The above-mentioned

improvements can all be attributed to intentional communication, focused on giving relevant content through bettering education.

Over the course of the 2018-2019 academic year, the Rockwell administrative and instructional teams engaged in a variety of work designed to increase the quality of and equitable access to Rockwell's educational program, as well as to strengthen family/school partnerships. This has included (a) participating in the district Inclusive practices pilot committee, (b) engaging the instructional staff in professional learning pertaining to Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, or SIOP, designed to support the needs of our students with emerging English skills, (c) engaging a representative constituency of certificated and classified staff members in professional learning pertaining to Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), in preparation for our official PBIS launch this coming fall, (d) equity work that has included the development of a site-based Equity team, as well as the presentation of professional learning related to Culturally Responsive practices. The counselor been reading the book 'Courageous Conversations about Race' in class sessions then students reflect on biases to promote self-growth in the area of equality. (e) regular social-emotional learning in classrooms presented by the counselor with home extension activities which spark conversation and anti-bullying sessions presented by the principal, and (f) presentations by the principal during PTA general membership sessions, during which the administrative team shared information about parent rights and responsibilities based on district board policy and state law.

Collaboration between school/PTA is imperative in strengthening two-way communication, bettering systems of engagement and increasing quality instruction. The School of Excellence program is essential for guiding schools like us to success.

3. Jane S. Roberts K8 Center PTSA

For the School of Excellence program, we decided to focus our attention on improving the education of our students by attempting to engage more of our families. As a result, more families have been provided with valuable information to help their children succeed in school. Our school community has become more welcoming, inclusive and respectful. The program has allowed us to remain aligned with the PTA's mission to make every student's potential a reality by engaging and empowering their families and the local community.

To create a climate that is welcoming for all families, we planned several events throughout the school year for families to get to know one another and relate to each other both in and out of school. At the beginning of the year we held a family night at the local ice arena for families to come together and socialize. Later in the year, we also hosted a family night with the Miami Heat basketball team, which included a performance by our band students before the game. In addition, this year we participated in the National PTA Reflections art program. We had a total of 52 entries in visual arts and literature, of which two became district winners. The awards ceremony held to honor the participants was a wonderful morning with many proud parents in attendance. On the heels of the Reflections competition, we hosted an art show for all our second through fifth grade students. Parents were able to walk through a gallery filled with many colorful masterpieces and talk amongst each other. These events were well received by many of the parents who made it a point to thank us for organizing them. Our final survey results indicate that our always rating improved with an average increase of 26% as it relates to encouraging families to volunteer, showing respect to all families, listening to families concerns and establishing policies to recognize diversity.

To keep families informed about important issues and events throughout the school, we utilized various means of communication. To recruit volunteers, alerts were sent out through the Remind notification program. Announcements and photos were posted on the school's Instagram page throughout the school year. In addition, this year, we emailed all registered PTSA members a summary of our meetings for those who could not attend the meetings in person. All the flyers handed to the students were sent home in English and Spanish and were also posted on social media. The final survey results showed 78% of those surveyed selected always as it related to communicating with our families in various ways. This was an increase of 22% from our initial survey. Questions related to communicating effectively, namely having friendly signs in multiple languages and translating communications, showed an average increase of 18% within the always rating.

To improve parental engagement and increase student achievement, we offered several opportunities for families to learn how to strengthen learning at home. We hosted a digital literacy night where a member of the law-enforcement community shed light on internet safety. Utilizing first-hand experience from his line of work, the speaker provided a presentation on technological trends, internet safety and security and peer to peer platform exchanges and explained the best practices to protect children and parents from malicious cyber-threats. We also held a free movie night as a culminating activity following the tech talk where we featured the movie 'Ralph Breaks the Internet.' We had a great turnout for that event with many families coming together with their blankets and chairs in the school's cafeteria. In addition to teaching digital literacy, we hosted an information session to help parents prepare their children for standardized testing. A representative from the local university's psychology department for children and families presented the best strategies for studying at home and reducing test anxiety. In addition to providing parents with valuable information, the representative also shared important resources related to mental health offered by the university. The final survey results show an increase of 18% as it relates to helping families understand how to support their child's learning.

To strengthen our school's presence in the community we reached out to a few organizations including the local university as mentioned above. At our first PTSA meeting we invited a financial planner to make a presentation to our families. In the main office of our school, we have a parent resource center filled with valuable information from various organizations around the community. In partnership with our Student Council, the school also gave back to the local

community with a food and toy drive. The survey data shows an average increase of 17% as it relates to community partnerships and resources.

Our school has grown considerably as it relates to family-school partnerships. We ended the school year with a larger volunteer force, more participation at our events and more productive conversations and suggestions. We have been able to create more connections among our school's families and within the community. The final survey results indicate an increase of almost 30% in the always category when it comes to our school being a central part of the community. We hope to continue strengthening our family-school partnerships in the years to come.