

1. Helen Keller Jr High School PTA

Our greatest accomplishment in strengthening family-school partnerships was creating a program to address families' concerns about the mental health and well-being of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. We worked with the school to implement a program to educate our students and raise awareness about the importance of mental health, provided additional mental health resources for our families through new and revamped communication vehicles, and created a forum for families to share resources to communicate more effectively. We integrated with the school to create an impactful, ongoing program to address parents' concerns about students' mental health.

The school improvement goal we identified was finding new ways to keep families informed and to communicate effectively with them in an atypical, frequently changing, majority virtual school year. There were no in person events, handouts, or volunteers on campus. We updated existing channels of communications and created new channels to reach our school community. In doing so, we created new forums for informing families and encouraged two-way communication. We laid the groundwork for future, ongoing communication with families.

Accomplishments:

- Integrated with school leadership and staff to create and launch a new Mental Health program.
 - Worked with staff and existing curriculum to implement a series of three mental health lessons in students' SEL classes. Parents were provided with additional resources after lessons through PTA emails and social media updates.
 - The Move a Mile for Mental Health event took place during PE classes for both in person and remote students to raise awareness about the importance of mental health. School staff, families, and the school district community were encouraged to participate.
 - Event posted on school social media sites and calendar.
 - Flyers posted in school.
 - Marquee outside school updated to reflect event.
 - In-person students chalked the walk the day before the event to increase engagement and awareness.
- Reinvigorated PTA digital resources through webpage and social media updates. Our principal emphasized the importance of having these platforms for us to effectively communicate to families in this and future school years.
 - Gained 25 new followers on our PTA Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts, as well as increased viewing. The school Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts increased activity and had 10-15 new followers on each platform.
 - Launched a PTA Digital Scavenger Hunt to advertise our digital resources and encourage two-way communication between the families and PTA. We plan to use this scavenger hunt at the start of every year to engage new families.
 - Updated the PTA page on our school website to keep families informed.
 - Utilized MemberHub to create a Mental Health Resources Sharing forum and provide more detailed information about the Mental Health Program.
- May survey results showed:
 - 66% found the Mental Health program helpful for students
 - 20% participated in the Digital Scavenger Hunt
 - 13% participated in the Mental Health Sharing forum

- When asked during Student and Staff monthly focus groups, students reported: “The PTA Digital Scavenger Hunt was fun!”

Our PTA’s investments in Communicating Effectively through revamping and creating new communication channels, as well as Integrating with school leadership, staff, and curriculum have created continuous, positive change to the school by having multiple ways to effectively communicate with families and putting a relevant Mental Health program in place that will be used in future school years.

We practiced Communicating Effectively with families through:

- Increasing the PTA social media and website presence to connect and communicate with families virtually, as in-person events were not held this year.
- Sending monthly PTA emails and providing PTA messaging in the principal’s weekly email update with links to learn more about topics and provide feedback.
- Holding a Digital PTA Scavenger Hunt to encourage two-way communication and make students, families, and staff aware of the new and revamped social media platforms and online resources.
- Creating online sharing forums.

We Collaborated with the Community through a connection with the Schaumburg Township Mental Health Committee made on our PTA social media account. This local committee had been working with the local school district to advocate for mental health, but not with PTAs. Our PTA’s connection and resulting discussion with the Mental Health Committee created a new partnership between the Schaumburg Township Mental Health Committee and Schaumburg Township Council of PTAs. Information from the Mental Health Committee will now be provided to the Council of PTAs and they will trickle information down to individual PTAs within our school community.

We Welcomed all Families to our monthly PTA Zoom meetings through invitations via our principal’s regular updates, PTA emails, PTA Website page, and social media posts. We also welcomed all families to participate in our online resource sharing forum and Digital Media Scavenger Hunt.

We Supported Student Success by creating a program that addressed the very relevant topic of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. We aimed to raise awareness about the importance of seeking assistance for mental health issues and reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness.

Our PTA Integrated with school leadership and staff to connect and align the Mental Health program within the framework of existing SEL lessons. Teachers reviewed the existing material and re-worked their lessons plans to include specific mental health lessons. PE teachers worked with in-person students to chalk the walk the day before the Move a Mile event to raise awareness about mental health. The PE teachers also hosted the Move a Mile for Mental Health event during PE classes. School leadership supported the PTA’s implementation of this new program, helped us distribute program communication, and agreed the program would continue in future curriculum.

We are proud of the continuous, positive change we created at Keller this school year. We had to pause and shift gears multiple times to adjust with the school district’s changing guidelines. We opened new forums to effectively communicate with families and integrated with our school to create an impactful, ongoing program to address families’ concerns about students’ mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Miami Beach Senior High PTSA

Our greatest accomplishment in strengthening family-school partnerships was increased communication and collaboration among families, teachers, administrators and staff. The School of Excellence (SOE) provided a framework and platform to spark discussions about enhancing communication, college and career readiness, and vertical alignment within our feeder pattern. We used it to gain collaboration and made positive gains in beginning the process of setting up future procedures.

Although from our initial survey, our school's most common answer was "Always" for all questions, we identified areas with the most room for improvement. For example, "Clear, two-way conversations" we worked with teachers and administration to create a chart to help everyone understand the steps to take when students need additional academic support. To help families "understand how to support their child's learning" we created a weekly e-mail with a "tip of the week" covering topics such as how to navigate the parent portal, find teacher/administrator/counselor e-mail addresses, hear the morning announcements, change from online to in-person, learn about college and career opportunities and much more. To address how to "involve parents in planning for student transitions", we created a parent committee on vertical alignment, brought in teachers and administrators, and were able to plan a series of zoom orientations for incoming students before filling out their subject selection forms to enter high school. An example of "our school listens to families' concerns", when a group of parents wanted to change the start time of the school - we took a survey of all parents (not just the ones present at meetings) to make sure we accurately reflected the desires of the total population. We also had a meeting where all stakeholders could make their case and vote. This provided a forum for 2-way conversation as well as addressing concerns of all.

We helped the college counselor and the CTE department head spread their messages to students and parents to address our school improvement goal regarding college-and career-ready standards. We increased awareness of many opportunities through e-mails, social media and zoom sessions. Our college counselor brought a program designed originally to help low income and first generation students apply to college, titled CARS - College Application Readiness Symposium. June 2020 was the first year of the program, and 114 students attended. One measurable outcome was 100% of those students were accepted to top elite universities such as Harvard, Cornell, Columbia. This year, so far 200 students are registered. We continue to build, recruiting the participants of this summer's workshop to aid their peers next fall.

Since we started SOE in 2019, 90% of seniors who graduated in 2020 reported they were planning to attend either a 2 or 4 year university, and 5% planned to either enter the military, trade school or work force. (Awaiting 2021 data).

To help students and parents understand how to navigate the college application process, we scheduled a series of zooms by grade level, created group chats through Facebook, Instagram, twitter and even TikTok and WhatsApp to capture students' attention in their social media comfort zones.

Each year our high school provides 150 - 200 students with career-ready industry certifications through curriculum and testing. Covid caused major challenges regarding testing platforms, shifting from in-person to virtual, software and hardware installations, etc., yet over 300 students earned industry certifications since we started SOE.

Our investments in family engagement translated to continuous, positive change to the school as a result of the work. We have been laying the groundwork for the procedures we have seen working so far to become standard operating procedure within not just our high school but our feeder pattern. Through the lens of the SOE application, we have been able to get administration from the schools to work together on the transitions. The second survey shows we greatly increased both the number of respondents and our percentage of people responding 'always' and decreased or held steady the number of 'Never' or 'Don't Know'.

Because so many of our students chose the virtual/My School Online (MSO) version, the challenge of welcoming all families became tied into communicating effectively with families in the Covid-19 pandemic environment. Therefore, we combined Standards 1 and 2, and used a variety of communication platforms to accomplish our goals. In addition to using e-mail, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, we increased our presence with WhatsApp and TikTok. We encouraged our school to also increase their social media presence, as well as send out school wide phone calls and e-mails for important zoom events. We also worked with teachers and administrators to develop a communication flowchart to make sure teachers all knew the steps to take when their students need more support, including talking to the student first, then the parent, getting counselors and administrators involved and/or mental health professionals.

In our educational programming we considered the needs of students from all backgrounds to be inclusive and individualized including those that were first generation American, those that need to go straight to a career, those that didn't think they could go to college but can, those that knew they wanted to go to college but didn't know how. We included programming on junior Navy ROTC, career readiness, and college preparedness. We regularly sent out messages in multiple languages, as well as met with ESE teachers to discover their needs, and provided grants to teachers who needed supplies to enhance the education of their students.

We began a very important conversation about accountability by all stakeholders for each and every student. We are establishing protocols for identifying struggling students and helping them land on an academic path that's right for them. School counselors and teachers have committed to sharing observations and providing feedback during subject selection to ensure that students are thriving in their respective academic tracks. In a school of over 2,400 students, this is a huge undertaking, and so fostering our students' individuality is a goal we continue to work towards.

3. Hembree Springs Elementary School PTA

After analyzing our baseline survey results, our School of Excellence (SOE) team identified our goal as “Improve Education” and the corresponding objective as, “To grow family participation in advocacy.” As the team developed our Roadmap to Excellence, we consciously wove the theme, “Your Voice Matters” into our efforts. We determined a list of programs, activities, ideas and improvements to connect families with advocacy opportunities and increase awareness of resources. Examples include the launch of a monthly advocacy newsletter, a PTA Facebook page and a family literacy event based on our book, “Say Something,” by Peter Reynolds, to coordinate with our theme. Additionally, PTA board members attended local and national legislative conferences as well as school board meetings in an effort to gain training and knowledge with respect to advocacy. Key learnings were shared broadly with our school community. Our greatest accomplishment, however, is the creation of our Ask PTA! program.

The Ask PTA! program provides a monthly, 1-hour forum for semi-structured conversation between parents and school leaders. Each meeting had its own specific theme and guest speaker. We used survey results and ongoing parent feedback to prioritize topic choices. We achieved this via our newly launched “advocacy newsletter,” where we not only shared information but also actively solicited parent ideas and feedback.

Using this feedback, we realized that a bridge between home and school was an urgent need. With the challenges of COVID - virtual learning, as well as the inability for parents to physically be present in the school - nurturing connections within the Hembree Springs school community became increasingly important. As we continually adjusted our program based on parent response, we also evolved our School of Excellence objective from advocacy to increasing family engagement to support student success.

As part of this evolution, we added and adjusted topics for our Ask PTA program. In place of having district and state elected leaders present, we highlighted our local school leaders and experts. In place of exclusively sharing advocacy topics, we offered topics such as literacy, transitions, assessments, principal updates, and “summer slide.”

We consider the Ask PTA! meetings our most successful program for a variety of reasons. Where we shared information via Ask PTA! Meetings, we saw significant improvements - this includes the measure of “school involving parents in planning for student transitions” (up 28% from our initial survey results), as well as “our school informing and encouraging families to advocate for students” (up 14%). We were also able to measure participation through in-person attendance and “views” of the recordings. Although each session typically had around 15-25 participants attend, recordings were also heavily viewed - from 20 - 100 times depending on the topic. Our session topics of assessments and parent/teacher conferences were our most popular, followed closely by our social/emotional learning session.

Additionally, at the end of the survey, we asked a few open-ended questions. The responses were positive and encouraging. One parent described the sessions as “very helpful (making) me feel connected during a “disconnect” time. I would love to cover “life after Covid” whenever we start to get back to more normal. Reacclimating our kids to the new normal in and out of school.” Both the quantitative and these qualitative results indicate that we should continue this program, as it is creating continuous positive change at our

school. Even in areas where we didn't intentionally focus efforts, we see improvements - with 95% of questions from the last survey showing increases.

Standard 3: Supporting Student Success and Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child best align with our modified efforts. Successful Ask PTA! sessions were the literacy session - which included the sharing of resources, tips and a general overview of literacy - as well as our latest Ask PTA! session, which presented information and resources on facilitating learning through the summer months. Additionally, our Assistant Principal facilitated a session on interpreting test results and shared tips and resources on effective parent-teacher conferences. We believe these sessions drove improvements for several questions including "school involves parents in planning for student transitions." Notably, in the first survey, this question had 30% of parents responding "unknown"; whereas, in the second survey only 5% of parents indicated they were unaware of important transitions. This measure indicates we are successfully reaching our parents with resources and information.

Our Ask PTA! sessions were designed to support the whole child by ensuring that students and parents have awareness of critical resources. Another session focused on social/emotional learning, and included a panel with our school psychologist, therapist and counselor. Based on parent feedback, the Ask PTA! sessions were a means of addressing our families' concerns and helping to develop better supports for our students. One parent surveyed said, "I think this year the virtual learning discussions were most timely and relevant and helpful. I found all of the Ask PTA learning sessions to be very honest conversations between school leadership and parents. I appreciated this opportunity and would like to see them continue."

Our Ask PTA! sessions were successful because they were individualized. Sessions were 1-hour and offered topics of interest to parents. We hosted the sessions in the evening and offered recordings of each session so parents could listen when convenient. Parent feedback guided the topic choices, and we reserved 20 minutes during every session for a parent-led Q&A. Importantly, we had Spanish translators available to ensure access for our Spanish-speaking parents. Sessions were also highly integrated with the inclusion of teachers and administrators as presenters and topics that link to learning.

The School of Excellence program provided us with valuable information that we leveraged to foster stronger and deeper relationships with our families and community members. The positive impacts are evident across the board - 95% of our survey questions showed improvement, and 15% showed double digit improvement, across all standards areas. The program enabled us to be intentional and specific regarding the needs of our community - leading to the creation of programs and initiatives that will generate ongoing improvements for our school community in years to come.