

Country Parkway PTA - Phoebe Apperson Hearst Outstanding Family-School Partnership Award

As a result of our PTA's participation in the School of Excellence program, we were able to identify a previously unrealized gap in our family-school partnership; specifically a need to offer home-based enrichment resources and activities meant to support educational goals, reinforce classroom-taught lessons, and strengthen academic skills at home. By way of our participation in the SOE program, our greatest accomplishment has been recognizing this need and developing a school-wide program that focuses on providing useful tools and offering fun academic challenges that encourage family involvement in student success. Most significantly, the level of participation in, and widely positive response to these challenges has inspired our school and PTA to carryover this programming into the summer break and coming school year!

Based on our initial School of Excellence Survey, our Country Parkway PTA teamed up with parents, staff, and faculty to improve the educational experience of our students by increasing access to home-based enrichment resources and activities meant to strengthen the family-school partnership. Our goal was to help families better understand how they could support their child's learning at home (survey question #7). In our initial survey, only 63.2% of respondents replied "Always" to this statement, however after focusing on implementing programming to support fun and engaging at-home learning, 81.5% of those who completed the final survey responded "Always" to this statement. This demonstrates a significant improvement on this metric!

Specifically, we sought to increase family engagement in supporting student success by providing resources and tools for families to reinforce classroom-taught lessons and strengthen academic skills at home. In conjunction with our Strategic Decision Making Team, the PTA sponsored school-wide academic challenges during the Winter, February, and Spring Breaks. The high level of participation and positive feedback from students, parents, and staff was indicative of the success of this line of programming. Due to the hugely positive response to these new programs, our school and PTA have decided to carry these over to the coming year and make them an official part of our school-PTA program. This is our greatest accomplishment; creating programming that met an identified need, drove widespread participation, and will be carried over to future school years. The staying power of these programs speaks to the impact of this School of Excellence process on our school and PTA!

Several questions on the SOE survey spoke to a previously unidentified need for at-home academic support meant to strengthen the family-school partnership. In deciding how to effectively participate in the School of Excellence program this year, our SOE Team focused on addressing needs that were teased out from conversations with parents and responses to 5 of the 20 statements on the initial survey (87 responses). With a goal of investing in family and student engagement, we were very pleased to see improvement in each of these metrics on the final survey (120 responses).

The significant improvement seen across what we considered to be our 3 key metrics for assessing the success of this newly implemented programming is undeniable (see below). The SOE program inspired amazing changes at Country Parkway that we hope to continue for years to come!

Our school helps families understand how they can support their child's learning.

- Always: Initial 63.2%, Final 81.5%

Our school involves parents in planning for student transitions. NOTE: Parent comments focused heavily on school break transitions and the need for academic support during these weeks/days off from school.

- Always: Initial 48.3%, Final 63.3%

Our school considers families to be equal partners in decision making.

- Always: Initial 58.6%, Final 73.9%

To help our families better support at-home student learning needs, the PTA sponsored three challenges during school breaks. The first challenge focused on encouraging reading during the Winter Break. Students were challenged to partake in various fun reading activities at home. Classroom winners were treated to a “Snow Day of Play” with our school Principal. Participation in classrooms was very high across all grade levels during our Winter Break Challenge: UPK: 75%, K: 89%, 1: 94%, 2: 98%, 3: 94%, 4: 93%.

During February Break, the PTA sponsored a Math Challenge/Math Game Kit with additional math games being sent home on a monthly basis during the remainder of the school year. Math games were tailored to each grade level. Students were encouraged to play math games with their family and friends over the break (and beyond). Winners were selected at each grade level and received a free book. This program was very well-received by students and families alike. As a result, the school is planning to host a Math Game Night in September to kick-off the continued monthly math games which will extend into the 2022-2023 school year!

Most recently, the PTA/school hosted a Spring Break STEAM Challenge. Students were encouraged to complete a tic-tac-toe challenge board at home. The board was filled with fun STEAM-based activities that encouraged family participation in out-of-the box thinking. The challenge drew GREAT participation at each grade level with families posting creative submissions. Classroom winners enjoyed “Popsicles with the Principal”...a favorite among all of our students!

The implementation of home-based enrichment resources and activities has strengthened the family-school partnership and resulted in a positive change to our school as evidenced by the level of participation, positive feedback, and subsequent decision to carry these changes over to the coming summer break and school year.

In addressing identified needs from the initial responses to our SOE Survey, our team aligned itself with several of the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships with a focus on Standard 3: Supporting Student Success. We also focused on Transformative Family Engagement with an emphasis on further Integrating parents into their students' success by providing them with Impactful tools and engaging resources to advance academic achievement from home.

With the introduction of our school break challenges, we sought to further engage families in classroom learning and promote after-school learning opportunities by offering families additional resources for at-home use. These home-based enrichment tools and activities focused on reinforcing classroom-taught lessons and strengthening academic skills. By providing parents with useful and fun tools and activities, we further integrated parents into being active participants in the development of essential skills and lessons for their children. We also empowered families to have a greater impact on and better support their students' success by providing them with opportunities to practice skills and interact with their children in a meaningful way outside of the school day.

Our PTA and SOE team focused on Improving Education with a specific goal of increasing family engagement to support student success. By investing in this objective we have further enhanced the school-family partnership; a relationship that is crucial to the long-term academic achievement of every child. We empowered caregivers to be more involved in their students' academic success and encouraged our students to actively continue learning with caregivers at home. We strongly believe that we have achieved our goal to enhance the family-school partnership and hope to retain our status as a National School of Excellence.

Kingwood Middle PTA - Phoebe Apperson Hearst Family-School Partnership Award of Merit

Kingwood Middle School and our PTA have worked hard in our journey to excellence. Our greatest accomplishment during this journey was our efforts in ensuring the health and safety of all our students with a goal of supporting students' emotional and mental well-being that coincidentally coincided with the goal of preventing all forms of bullying and encouraging healthy peer relationships. These efforts not only would impact students this year, but be an impactful and continuous, positive change for years to come to live within our school culture and to provide a safe, respectful, and collaborative learning environment for all students.

We accomplished our goal by implementing many programs and activities this school year that laid the groundwork for years to come such as:

- Counselor's Corner gave us the ability to support student success and speak up for every child. Here is where school counselors met individually with each and every student, exactly 990 members of our student population, to provide them with personalized counseling and emotional support while building trusting relationships with an adult. This is such a tremendous accomplishment to meet with the entire student population including new and incoming students. This endeavor was inclusive and impactful to our students and some chose to continue meeting with their counselor as they felt comfortable and safe with the relationships they built. Our goal is to meet with each and everyone of our students each year as we were able to see this program's impact on our students.
- Restorative Circles gave us the ability to support student success and speak up for every child. Here is where a member of our administration team attended a training session with the National Educator's for Restorative Practices. Circle training was then given to five members of the Student Council/National Junior Honor Society where they then trained 102 teachers and staff on how to correctly conduct a restorative circle in August. Teachers and staff then were able to train each and every student of our 990 student population on how to conduct and participate in circles. Restorative Circles allowed teachers and students to become active listeners while increasing vulnerability with genuine empathetic moments. Circles were used throughout the year to impact and provide skills such as listening, reflecting, and understanding in a non-judgmental space, giving students a sense of belonging. Restorative circles allowed us to give our students a voice and show their individuality and were impactful for students and teachers alike. Teachers and staff were able to do this on a daily to a weekly basis. Circles were also integrated into our advisory lessons that focused on empathy, building character, relationship skills, and doing the right thing. These lessons and restorative practices will be built into our future curriculum at Kingwood Middle School.
- Clubs afforded us the ability to support student success and speak up for every child. Here we invited students to collaborate on what clubs they would like to create based on their individual interests. We then supported these groups by assigning them a staff volunteer to help run and participate in their chosen club. KMS had 24 inclusive and different clubs that were held after school where kids could have fun together and get to meet other students with similar interests to help encourage healthy peer relationships and have fun without fear of judgment from others. According to our book study of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, we learned that our students should celebrate their differences. Their participation in these clubs afforded them that opportunity all while being impactful and supporting their emotional and mental well-being.
- Safety Summit allowed us to welcome all families into the school community, communicate effectively, support student success, speak up for every child, share power, and collaborate with the community. Our efforts were inclusive, individualized, integrated, and impactful. We hosted a first of its kind event in our district that focused on student, family, and community safety. This event was advertised on posters, social media (Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter), weekly newsletter, and KMS email, to invite our students and families to attend. This event had over 25+ booths made up of school staff, local community members, and stakeholders to inform and teach our students and families about suicide prevention, bullying and how to report, bike safety, water safety,

food safety, CPR, first aide, Stop the Bleed, EPI-pens, hurricane preparedness, vehicle and bus safety, cyber safety, etc. Members of the Humble ISD and Houston Police Department, Kingwood Emergency Hospital, City of Houston, Cub Scouts, Kingwood Fire Department, local paramedics, school and local counselors, and Project Protect Our Children attended and informed our students, parents, and community about the importance of safety. We had a total of 200 attendees and over 30 staff and community volunteers. This investment we plan on hosting for our community members for years to come to bring awareness and a shared interest in protecting our students and community.

Our baseline survey, taken by 75 participants, indicated that we needed to improve in the area of welcoming all families by means of providing friendly signs and messages in multiple languages as needed, scoring only ‘Sometimes’ as the response of our participants. In our final survey, we were able to move those results to ‘Always’ with a total of 119 survey participants suggesting we were able to strengthen our family partnerships. Since we started our journey to excellence and focusing on welcoming all families our Twitter memberships jumped to 1,769 followers and our Facebook jumped to 643.

We were able to achieve these results by implementing the following example programs and activities:

- **Emerging Bilingual Program:** Seventy-one, non-English speaking families were personally contacted in their native language to welcome them to campus and our community and offer them assistance in any way we could. If there was a translator that we needed, we found volunteers to assist and even outsourced translators to help us serve and better communicate with these families. We continued in our efforts to welcome all families and keep them as partners in their child’s education by advertising events and programs through our social media outlets and our weekly newsletter called the KMS Cougar Connect Newsletter. Our newsletters offered parents the option to select what language they need their information translated to if needed which has been shown to be very helpful when it comes to our communications and involvement of our KMS families and stakeholders.
- **Parents of Pupils Night:** We welcomed families by advertising the event on Facebook, Twitter, newsletter, KMS Connect email system, and created posters. At this come and go event, parents and families were able to experience what their children were learning and get resources to help encourage math skills at home. Students were able to participate in fun, engaging activities with their families and show their parents what they’ve learned and introduce them to some STEM activities. Families could pick up goody bags and sit at picnic tables to play games together with teachers and volunteers floating around to assist them on how to use the materials and resources. We held a raffle for families to win prizes and provided a snack table. We had a total of about 64 people that attended this event and 17 volunteers.

This was not just a year-long program for us to work towards, but one that will be ongoing and sustain us in the future with many of these improvements to be an integral part of our school culture. Our students are stronger, our relationships are stronger, and our overall understanding of our school community’s needs are strengthened.

Riverside STEM Academy PTSA - Phoebe Apperson Hearst Family-School Partnership Award of Merit

RSA PTSA's 2021-22 JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE: Implementing New Communication Tools to Engage Families When Parents are Not Allowed on Campus

Riverside STEM Academy PTSA has worked to improve the educational experience for parents, teachers, and students alike since our school's founding in 2011. As for so many schools, nearly all our traditional efforts were shut down when COVID closed our campus for all but the last three weeks of the 2020-21 school year. Heading into the 2021-22 school year, we knew students would be allowed on campus, but parents would not. Our PTSA faced this continuing COVID challenge by seeking new ways to promote family-school partnerships, using the National PTA 'School of Excellence' program as a guide.

Getting Started. In October 2021, our PTSA emailed the 'School of Excellence' survey to the ~550 households at Riverside STEM Academy (a public middle and high school serving grades 5-12). Our Excellence Team (made up of PTSA board members, RSA Foundation leadership, and school administrators) included the 20 required multiple-choice "School of Excellence" questions intended to measure our school's effectiveness at (1) welcoming all families, (2) communicating effectively, (3) supporting student success, (4) speaking up for every child, (5) sharing power, and (6) collaborating with the community. We also added two of our own free-response questions: Is there a project or program that you would like to see implemented at STEM? How do you think we can improve your student's STEM experience?

Identifying a School Improvement Goal. Our initial survey results highlighted many strengths and some areas for improvement. Some requests--such as face-to-face meetings with teachers, more field trips, and allowing volunteers on campus--could not be addressed due to ongoing COVID restrictions. Written comments to our two ad hoc questions exposed a need for more and better communication from the school. Families wanted to know more about what is going on with their students, what is happening during the school day, what kinds of extracurricular and tutoring options they could encourage their students to participate in, and what they could do to be more involved with their students' school. These comments inspired our Excellence Team to brainstorm and implement multiple new avenues of family communication that work around the serious limitations that COVID restrictions impose.

Designing Measurable Outcomes. Our Excellence Team brainstormed with our school principal to design and implement multiple new communication tools during the 2021-22 school year:

- Biweekly Newsletter. This year was the inaugural year of a biweekly newsletter, 'Android Bytes,' which features updated middle school and high school calendars and other information, including spirit days and dances, for our students to show school spirit and enjoy their time at school; tutoring opportunities for before/after school and lunchtime tutoring, by both teachers and students; and extracurricular opportunities, including after-school basketball and track-and-field practices.
- Virtual Meetings with the Principal. PTSA hosted virtual meetings we called 'Coffee Break with the Principal,' where parents were encouraged to join a Zoom meeting to learn about STEM happenings and to ask questions face to face.
- Monthly Dine-Out Fundraisers. Knowing that personal connection is always best, we were able to have consistent and delicious Dine-Out fundraisers where people could gather in person to support our school. These events also addressed family survey requests for new ways to show school spirit, which has been especially challenging with all the COVID restrictions.
- Mental Health Emails. In the initial survey, parents expressed interest in mental health support and team building. Several times during the year, emails went out to families encouraging students to participate in small counseling groups and peer-to-peer talking circles.
- Family Feedback. Promoting two-way communication was another element of our new communication strategy. Late in the school year, our team sent out an email to all families outlining the above efforts the school made in response to the initial 'School of Excellence' survey and encouraging them to respond to the final survey in May

2022. Both surveys were converted to Google Forms to make them easy to fill out, and we created a QR code link to make finding the survey effortless. We also promoted the surveys through the school's PTSA Facebook page.

Creating Continuous, Positive Change. Due, we think, to our improved communication with families over the course of the year, our survey response rate grew from 20% (113/550) for the initial survey in October to 23% (128/550) for the final survey in May. More importantly, our community's overall satisfaction with the national standards assessed in the survey also increased over the course of the year. By quantifying the survey responses (always=5, frequently=4, sometimes=3, never=2, unknown=1), we assigned an average score for each question; higher scores equate to greater satisfaction. This average 'satisfaction score' increased for each of the 20 mandatory questions between the initial and final surveys (see School of Excellence Survey Results: Average Scores, next page). Further, we assigned an overall satisfaction score to each survey by adding the scores for each question. This overall satisfaction score grew from 69% for the first survey to 80% for the final survey (with 100% equating to a perfect score of 5 on all 20 questions).

In the spirit of promoting continuous, positive change into the 2022-23 school year, our PTSA is optimistic that we will be able to re-institute many of our traditional pre-COVID community-building events. Working together with the Riverside STEM Academy Foundation, our Focus Area for family engagement will continue to be Improve Education. Specifically, we will work grow volunteer opportunities and volunteer participation among families. In our "School of Excellence" surveys, parents wondered if we could expand sports, clubs, homework assistance and tutoring. We look forward to opening more options for volunteerism, including tutoring and coaching after-school activities.

Another specific volunteer opportunity for parents will also serve to grow family participation in advocacy. We will need families to speak out in favor of plans for a new Riverside STEM High School and Education Center to be constructed on the campus of UC Riverside when the formal comment period for the project's Environmental Impact Report opens in the fall.

Aligning our Goal with National Standards. Our school improvement goal aligned naturally with Standard 2: Communicating Effectively. The PTA Roadmap to Excellence notes under Standard 2 that 'for families to be effective advocates for their children, the school must provide caregivers access to key information. This is an important step toward establishing open communication between school and home and building trust between key partners in a child's education.' Summarizing and conveying key information was the entire purpose of the new Android Bytes newsletter, which also promoted an even greater sense among families that 'our school helps families understand how they can support their child's learning.'

Our strategy also aligned with three of the Four I's for Transformative Family Engagement:

- By empowering families to support their children's success, we were **IMPACTFUL**.
- By intentionally communicating with families via multiple channels, we offered an **INTEGRATED** approach to family engagement.
- By finding a way to gather families in person, outside of campus, we created an **INDIVIDUALIZED** approach to family engagement, which helps us address unique needs of every family and child.