

Bells Ferry School PTA – Phoebe Apperson Hearst Outstanding Family-School Partnership Award

Overview: The Bells Ferry Elementary PTA had two major goals this year. Those goals were to increase family engagement and to increase student achievement. Based on data from the National School of Excellence Survey we distributed in October, we learned that our families were wanting more translated materials/services, a deeper understanding of the curriculum, and tips on how they could provide support to their students at home.

Our most significant work in increasing family engagement included expanding the number of members of PTA by 30%, translating 85% more of our documents for our families, and having a 99% open rate of our weekly newsletter. Attendance at our events has nearly doubled. Our most significant work in increasing student achievement includes a commitment to reading education by providing reading resources to 100% of our K-2 students and hosting a Bingo for Books night for all students.

We advocate for executive functioning by providing all of our 3-5 students with agendas. Additionally, we have provided mini-grants for our teachers to use to support classroom education. Our specialists, who impact all our students, also received grants. Last year, we partnered with Mathnasium to host a Math night for all of our families and this year, we supported our Foundation by providing volunteers for their first annual STEAM night where students and families were able to participate in educational activities outside of school hours. By engaging in these activities, we were able to effectively communicate ways our families could support their students' education at home and provide resources to them if additional support was needed.

Standard: Welcoming All Families

Goal: Building a Community of Belonging, Creating an Inclusive Environment

Data Driven Purpose: We want all families to feel seen, valued, and heard at Bells Ferry Elementary School.

Narrative: Our school has a very diverse population with over 20 languages spoken. While our county offers immediate translation of digital forms, we recognized that many of our paper copies were only being sent home in English. As a result, we collaborated with Cobb County Translation services to get our flyers translated. Many of our families expressed feeling more included and were happy to not have to rely on their children to translate documents. We had an increase in membership due to translated membership-related documents.

Measurable Results: We translated 85% of our print and digital materials with a goal of translating 100% of those materials for 2023-24.

Standard: Communicating Effectively

Goal: Exchange Information Between School and Families

Data Driven Purpose: We want every family at Bells Ferry Elementary to understand the impact that participating in PTA makes. We want every family to be able to share their questions and concerns regularly.

Narrative: With the transition to Memberhub in 2020, our PTA started sending a weekly newsletter called the Bandit Bulletin to every PTA member. Our stakeholders and sponsors also receive this newsletter. In time, we

realized that non-PTA members could benefit from the information as well and started sending it out to our entire school via the Cobb Technology Learning System (CTLs) on a weekly basis. This enabled our weekly newsletter to be translated for all of our families. We have had a visible increase in parent involvement/student participation in activities. We doubled our Bandit Boogie dance attendance due to increased communication and had to end the event early due to capacity! We have surpassed our budgeted goal for Spirit Nights due to high attendance, which we absolutely owe to our communication efforts. Our chairs post on our Facebook and Instagram pages. We post yard signs in advance of every event. We also send home translated flyers for our events so that our multilingual families are included. We have also continued to have hybrid PTA meetings so our families who cannot meet in person for whatever reason can actively participate in our local PTA.

Measurable Results: Bandit Bulletin is sent to over 490 members with an open rate of 99% via Memberhub. Bandit Bulletin is sent to all Bells Ferry Families via CTLs.

Standard: Supporting Student Success

Goal: Support Learning by Engaging Families

Data Driven Purpose: We know that student success is propelled by engaged families. We also know that many parents may have not had a positive experience in elementary school themselves. Our aim is to make sure every family feels supported and included at Bells Ferry.

Narrative: After our initial survey results, we found that our parents were unsure about how we prepare our students for the transition to middle school. We also had parents who felt they lacked an understanding of or access to our academic standards. To address the first issue, our 5th grade lead teacher, Mrs. Bass, coordinated a Zoom call with 5th grade parents to discuss the transition to middle school. Students also were able to visit and tour the neighborhood middle school. We were able to move from a "Sometimes" rating to an "Always" rating on statement 8. We hosted a 5th Grade Yearbook Signing party on May 24th where students were celebrated for their achievements in elementary school and were given tips on how to shine even brighter once they leave Bells Ferry. Additionally, during our Bingo for Books event in March, our PTA provided each parent with a flyer that had QR codes for every grade level's academic standards. This allowed parents easy access to our district standards. Since the QR code went directly to our district's site, the standards were translated automatically. Our PTA also recognized how important nutrition is when it comes to student success. As a result, we wrote and won a grant to get a new water bottle filling station put in our school in the intermediate hallway. We allocated \$1000 of our budget to fund a "snack closet" at school so students who were unable to bring a snack to eat would have one provided for them.

Measurable Results: Teacher, parent, and administration feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Our school community is dedicated to creating an environment that is inclusive. We have worked collaboratively with our teachers, families, and community stakeholders to ensure that every child at Bells Ferry is seen, valued, and heard. We have more work to do here but we are energized by the progress we've made thus far. We are thankful for the increased engagement due to translated materials and hope to continue to provide more services to our families. Participating in the School of Excellence program helped us

truly see if we were living out the PTA mission instead of just espousing it. We are happy to say that we are living it."

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Chaparral Elementary PTA – Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award of Merit

The School of Excellence program has been a wonderful experience for our PTA! We were excited to be asked to participate in the program as we set out to do it in a very intentional way. In October 2022 we deployed paper surveys at our highly attended Fall Festival. We were able to survey 91 families. The School of Excellence survey results highlighted a lot of our strengths, however, based on our initial survey, we identified that we needed to increase our family engagement so that we could support student success.

Chaparral PTA teamed up with staff, administration and the Community School Coordinator to first and foremost improve our family engagement. Our goal was to create a welcoming environment for our families because Covid had created a barrier to families being allowed in the school. In our initial survey 61% of respondents replied "Always" to survey question #20 (Our school is a central part of the community). We spent the school year focused on family nights that were educational but also fun!

A prime example, to help improve attendance we had a 1980's attendANCE mid year for students and families who had good attendance. The idea was that students who had perfect attendance for the semester received a free ticket to the dance. If you missed less than 5 days for the semester students paid \$1 to enter. We had 75 students who had perfect attendance or less than five absences.

Families were having such a delightful time and you could feel the energy in the room and the connections being made. After focusing on engaging with families, 91% of those who completed the final survey responded "Always" to question #20. This demonstrates to us that our families are feeling the shift in our school culture and proves we are becoming a more welcoming environment and growing as the hub of our community.

We really wanted to increase our family engagement so that we could support student success. In the fall we had a highly successful Math & Literacy Night. We felt that it was important to provide tools and resources for our families so that they were able to experience what their children were learning. During this event we had stations set up for our teachers to show parents how to read the different types of test scores so that they could understand how to better support their children academically at home. In the fall we had our Bingo for Books night which focused on reading and giving away books that families could take home. This event was one of our biggest of the year! The feedback that we received was overwhelmingly positive and appreciative. Plus, our midyear data showed that students made significant gains in both ELA and Math.

Our long-term goal is for students and families to feel a connection to the school. We had several events this year that centered around important activities that would help families be successful at home. A few of those included a meal planning night, sibling night, financial planning night and a cooking with kids night. We also felt that it was important to have conversations with our families, so we started Pastries with the Principals. One morning each month we invited families to join the principal for pastries and coffee so they could have an opportunity to ask questions and voice any concerns. We received a lot of great feedback from these families and appreciated the qualitative data that we were able to collect. It was also at these events that we gained

the most parents who received their volunteer background checks and started showing up to support the school, like helping with lunch and after school duty.

We felt a connection to two of the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. Our team felt it was crucial to align ourselves first with a focus on Standard 1: Welcome All Families. This was extremely important for us, and we incorporated it by focusing on our families who have historically been marginalized, our families in special education. As a special education hub school this was a personal mission to accomplish. We intentionally set out to make sure that all of our families knew about all the family engagement events by posting on our social media sites, sending home paper flyers and with the principal sending home robocalls. We made sure our calls, emails and flyers were done in multiple languages. Over the years our families with students in special education did not attend family school events. After making an effort to advertise in ways they would see, we saw an increase in those families' attendance at events all year! Many families told us later that they had never felt welcomed to attend these events until this year.

We also aligned ourselves with the National Standard 3: Support Student Success. Coming out of covid many of our students were behind and we knew we needed to empower our families to support their students' success, especially at home. Our Bingo for Books night distributed hundreds of books and as a PTA we had three Book Fairs throughout the year, the final one being buy one, get one free. Teachers worked hard on grade level interventions, and we can proudly say that across the board our end of year ELA scores went up!

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

- **Impactful:** We were intentional with our family engagement strategy so that we could optimize our families experiences at the school.
- **Integrated:** Our approach was integrated by using several methods to support student success both at school and at home. We focused on the whole child!
- **Inclusive:** Our PTA and Community School Coordinator built intentional relationships with our families so that they felt welcomed and had ways to get involved in the school community.

We are proud of the work we accomplished this year but know that this is only the beginning, and we will continue to pursue excellence using the National Standards of Family Engagement. Our proudest achievement is that our families went from being involved to being engaged!

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Twin Echo PTA – Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award of Merit

The main goal for Twin Echo School was to identify and integrate resources from the community to strengthen our school programs and family support. This was aligned to our pre-survey, as this question (#19) received one of the lowest "always" scores (72%). Approximately six months later, our post survey responses to the same question (#19) increased the number of "always" answers to 78%.

Our focus area was Ensuring Health and Safety of our students. Through Standard 6 of the Family - School Partnerships, we "Collaborated with our Community" in order to meet our students' and families' most basic needs. There were times when these efforts were very individualized, and times when they were inclusive and

serviced all students. Every single student at Twin Echo school benefited from one or more of the thirty or more community partnerships this school year.

For example, we had a small group of students (10 students) that have suffered the loss of a parent. The trauma and emotional stress of losing a parent is extremely difficult for young children to process. Our school social worker, Sarah Gafford, partnered with Southern Illinois Hospice to provide Heartlinks counseling at our school, during the school day. Mrs. Gafford also secured donations from Donors Choose and was able to make a "grief kit" for each student. By attending to the emotional needs of this group of students, they were able to process their grief and begin to focus on their academic success.

Another indicator of the success of this partnership was a particular day that one of the students was struggling. It was the anniversary of his parent's death and the student asked if the grief group could have lunch together. All of the students were quick to agree to this and rallied behind the grieving student. The impact of the bond created between these students and the support they gave one another was heartwarming!

Other efforts by the school nurse and health aide, Chelsey Ryterski, and Courtney Hay, were more global and addressed the entire student population. Our partnership with Eye Thrive allowed for all students to receive a vision screening. Thirty-eight students failed the screening and received a free eye exam. From that group, thirty-three students received eyeglasses - free of charge! One student also received a referral to Lighthouse for the Blind, a non-profit organization that assists individuals who are legally blind to maintain dignity and independence by providing education and support services. Correcting vision has had a huge impact for these students! Teachers immediately began to see academic improvement from the students - students were answering questions correctly, reading words correctly, and writing on the lines when answering questions. This partnership will continue to result in positive changes for our students.

In addition, Twin Echo School partnered with Delta Dental to provide free dental cleanings and exams for our students, and about 30% participated. Dental hygiene is important to our students' overall health and well-being. Twin Echo School partners with the local food pantry to provide "Tote Me Home" bags for families. These totes contain non-perishable food items and are sent home every Friday. In addition, a local church provides "weekend lunch bags." Several of our families are struggling and rely heavily on the free breakfast and lunch program at school. With the help of the food pantry and the local church, over 20 families are receiving additional food bags each week.

Other basic needs for our students include needing shoes and coats. Our school was able to partner with Collinsville Charities, Shoe Carnival and the First Student Bus Company to provide shoes and socks for our needy students. Throughout the school year, over 30 students benefited from this partnership. First Community Bank and the Collinsville Fire Department support our students by providing winter coats, hats and gloves - over 25 students benefited from this partnership this school year.

Our PE teacher, Doug Hansel, partnered with over 15 businesses to provide each of our students a free book each month. Doug received donations from insurance agents, plumbing companies, car dealerships, bakeries and many more local companies and organizations. Having books available in the home increases children's

vocabulary development, academic success and results in a lifelong impact on each of those students' educational careers.

Lastly, it became apparent that poor school attendance was negatively affecting school achievement for many students. Poor attendance makes it difficult for children to succeed in school, limiting their options for future success. The faculty and staff made a combined effort to focus on increasing our student attendance. These efforts have just begun, but we were able to partner with several local businesses to help us provide both family and student incentives. Club Carwash, Fun Spot Skating Rink, Camelot Bowl, East Town Bakery and Centerfield Fun Park are just a few of the local businesses that donated items for attendance incentives and rewards for our students and families. It is our hope that the incentives will cause an immediate and lasting effect.

In summary, our efforts to collaborate with our community to ensure the health and safety of our students have been both inclusive and individualized. We have successfully secured lasting partnerships with over 30 local businesses and organizations, just this school year. By providing dental care, vision correction, food and basic clothing we hope to have a positive impact on our families and will help to meet their most basic needs. Abraham Maslow's extensive research shows that an individual's basic needs must be met before he/she can meet his/her highest potential. Twin Echo School is continually striving to help meet the basic needs of every student and to help him/her achieve his/her highest potential. Our partnerships will allow us to continue these services in the future.