

**National  
PTA**

*everychild.one voice.*



**SCHOOL OF  
EXCELLENCE**

## **Excellence Lesson**

**Step #2 Overview:  
Selecting Your Focus in the Program**

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Hello and, as always, thank you for participating in the School of Excellence program and your efforts to achieve Excellence in transformative family engagement!

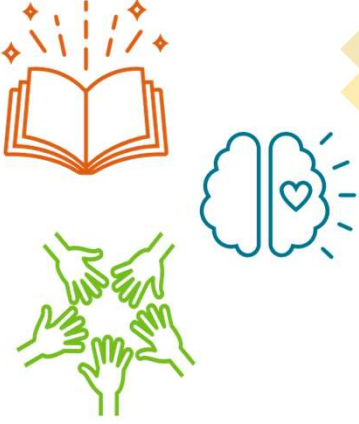
In this video, we will explore an important part of Step #2 - **Selecting Your Focus in the Program**

## Selecting Your Focus

**Your PTA will choose a Focus Area and a National Standard for your Excellence Action Plan.**

**Selecting an initial focus area helps your PTA**

- dig deeply into the work and prioritize depth over breadth
- intentionally align your work to PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships
- Effectively plan around a specific goal, rather than a list of ideas



Selecting a focus areas, and Nation Standard, is a required part of the program and is meant to help your PTA be intentional with your planning, which is ultimately the entire point of the School of Excellence program!

All PTAs are full of dreamers and volunteers with great ideas in lots of different areas, but often those one-off or short-term plans, which of course achieve admirable small wins, don't translate to long-last change. In contrast, and what make a school truly excellent, is how well they can organize around a specific goal and make plans that lead to real, long-lasting change that is transformative and accessible by their whole community.

It is important to set goals and remain aligned to them. So, in selecting your focus, your PTA should aim to make a selection that can be maintained through the school year. However, we understand that things happen.

If the selections you make shift through the year - That is okay! Your PTA can make those changes as long as your action plan remains aligned with the greatest needs identified by your community and best practice through the National Standards for Family School Partnerships

## Select Your Focus Area



### **Education & Enrichment**

Focus on improving education generally or focus on STEM, literacy and/or arts education.



### **Health, Safety & Well-Being**

Focus on one or many of the health and safety factors that impact overall child well-being.



### **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

Focus on DEI specific efforts that will make your community more equitable and inclusive.

The School of Excellence focus areas are Education and Enrichment, Health, Safety & Well-Being, and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. These options are broad, intentionally, to meet PTAs where they are at *now* and provide a pathway for success for all participants.

For example, the broad areas of focus allow PTAs that are already in the swing of things by the time they complete Step #2 to focus their Excellence Action plan on improving an ongoing effort through their selected National Standard and feedback they gathered. Similarly, PTAs that may have more planning to do, can use their action plan to determine their goals for the school year around their selected National Standard and feedback they gathered.

## Select Your Standard of Focus

- Within your broad focus area, choose:
  - (1) National Standard
  - (1) Goal, within the Standard
- Select the Standard **based on your community feedback results**



Within your broader focus area, you will select which of the Standards you will intention your work around, as well as the relevant goal. As with the focus area, you are asked to make this selection to help your PTA dig deeply into the work.

While your work will likely touch on all the Standards, anchoring your work in one area it pushes your PTA to double down on your work in this area – rather than doing a little bit here and there, it ensures your PTA is digging into the work and building long-lasting improvements. Best practices can be easy to do for the first time, but committing to those practices, building process around them and embedding them into practices is hard work and takes investment.

The selection you make should be based on your community feedback results.

Begin with places where your PTA has room to grow around the standards by noticing community feedback that is less positive. If there are several opportunity areas, select the place where your PTA can make the most improvement realistically. The School of Excellence program is meant to set your PTA up for success, so starting with a place where your PTA can make an impact and create momentum sets you up for more success in the future.

## Select Your Focus Area



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### **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

Focus on DEI specific efforts that will make your community more equitable and inclusive.

You'll note the areas are not exactly aligned to the National Standards or the community feedback materials. This is intentional and done to ensure your PTA further narrows down your efforts to make improvements around the National Standards by working jointly towards attainable, measurable and clearly articulated goals.



## School of Excellence Action Plan Goal

Our PTSA will make improvements around Standard 5: Share Power by focusing on ways to improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

In fact, you can think about choosing your Focus Area, similarly to outlining a goal. Goals are meant to help us take strategic action towards a certain end. Rather than an ideal, or dream, a goal is targeted and solely created to lead to a specific end results.

So, let's consider first a goal only generally aligned to the Standard and Focus Area, insomuch as they are mentioned. For example, "Our PTSA will make improvements around Standard 5: Share Power by focusing on ways to improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion."

This goal, while it mentions the Standard and Focus Area the PTA will work towards, does not provide direction for moving forward, nor does it outline specific measures or successes that will be achieved through this work.

## School of Excellence Action Plan Goal

Our PTSA will focus on Standard 5: Share Power by educating ourselves on how we can be more inclusive and welcoming to increase diverse membership, as well as creating new volunteer and leadership opportunities that will prioritize diverse perspectives and representation.

Compared to a goal aligned to a Standard through a Focus Area “Our PTSA will focus on Standard 5: Share Power by focusing on educating ourselves on how we can be more inclusive and welcoming to increase diverse membership, as well as creating new volunteer and leadership opportunities that will prioritize diverse perspectives and representation.

Clearly, the latter of these is much more action-oriented and, by outlining specifics, will help hold the Excellence Team accountable for working towards that goal. The specific areas outlined, however, are not too specific that they limit the PTA’s creative thinking around achieving the goal.



Now, on the next few slides, I'm going to outline each of the Focus Areas and provide an example of how our 2022-2024 Schools of Excellence designee tackled that work.

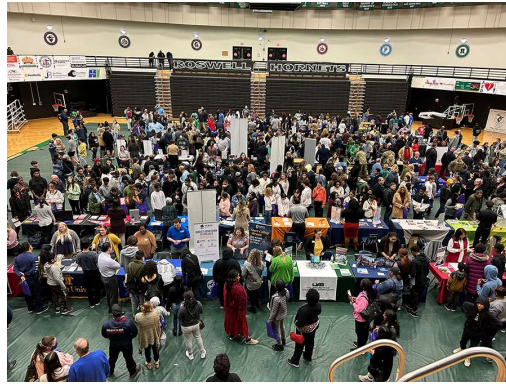


## Education & Enrichment



PTAs play an important role in

- helping families understand how to **encourage learning at home and in school**
- investing in **collaborative and equitable opportunities** for academic success
- providing families with tools and opportunities to practice **future planning**



Roswell High PTSA College Fair

**Education & Enrichment:** Roswell High PTSA found through their initial community feedback results that parents did not feel their students were well prepared for post high school transitions. Accordingly, the PTSA selected Standard 3: Supporting Student Success and Improving Education as their Standard and Focus Area respectively.

The PTSA collaborated with their administrative team to host a College Fair at the High School that was open to all families attending North Fulton high schools. The PTSA played a crucial role in supporting the college fair by leveraging various communication channels to advertise the event and encourage participation. Ultimately, the event had over 700 attendees with 50+ colleges and businesses represented. The PTSA included an array of different post-school opportunities, recognizing that not all students want to follow a college-pathway. Similarly, they recognized that some students may not know what they want to do at all, and so included breakout learning sessions to provide students and parents with detailed information on various topics related to post-secondary education.

As a result of the College Fair, the school decided to invite freshmen, sophomore, and junior students to meet with their counselors one on one to discuss class schedules for the following year. By expanding the timeline of meetings with counselors, students were able to establish a stronger and more meaningful relationship with their counselors earlier in their high school career. This, in turn, enabled counselors to gain a better understanding of each student's individual needs and goals, allowing them to create more effective educational plans tailored to each student's unique situation.

## Health, Safety and Well-being



**It is a shared responsibility of families, schools and PTAs to ensure that**

- **Health efforts are accessible and culturally relevant and help *all* families**
- **Safety efforts are preventative and help avoid unsafe situations from occurring**
- **Well-being efforts focus on mental and emotional health, as much as physical health**

Hello Kennedy Community,

It has been an incredibly busy month on the advocacy front for our PTSA. In response to the concerns raised by many Kennedy parents and students around the numerous overdose incidents at the school and the safety and security concerns specifically with the bathrooms in MCPS high schools, we've been partnering and collaborating with a number of stakeholders to ensure that those concerns are being heard and discussed.

More recently, in collaboration with B-CC PTSA leadership, John F. Kennedy PTSA Vice President Ricky Ribeiro spoke and submitted written testimony during the public comments portion of the MCPS Board of Education's Board Business Meeting on Feb. 7 on behalf of concerned Kennedy parents and students who feel the current solutions (removing and/or locking bathroom doors) is not a sufficient response to the urgent and alarming nature of what some are calling "the bathroom problem" in MCPS.



**Health, Safety and Well-being:** Kennedy PTSA in Maryland used their efforts in the School of Excellence program to respond to a dangerous and tragic increase in opioid overdoses. Roswell developed a three-pronged approach that weaved Standard 2: Communicate Effectively and Standard 4: Speaking up for Every Child into efforts focused on 1) Advocacy at the school and county level around health, wellbeing, safety and security; 2) Awareness building around mental health and well being; and 3) Student Wellness, especially Mental Health and Academic success.

Their advocacy resulted in improved communications from the school district on emergency Issues, increased safety and security at the High School with well-trained and proactive security, as well as a vape detection pilot program. In terms of awareness building around mental health and well-being, the PTSA worked to bring several awareness-building initiatives to the school, ranging from efforts with the district Medical Officer and the superintendent's officer around opioid safety in schools, like NARCAN training, to a series of "Speak Up Save Lives Assemblies" that provided students, teachers, parents, and the community resources regarding the opioid epidemic. As a result of the awareness work, the PTSA noted a decrease in emergency notifications and overdose incidents at school.

Finally, the PTSA worked to enhance student wellness with their "Kennedy Zen Den," which is a place for students to de-stress, share their feelings with other students, and talk with a trusted peer or adult about school/life balance and fears about their future.

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



**PTA is meant to represent and respect people from different backgrounds and identities.**

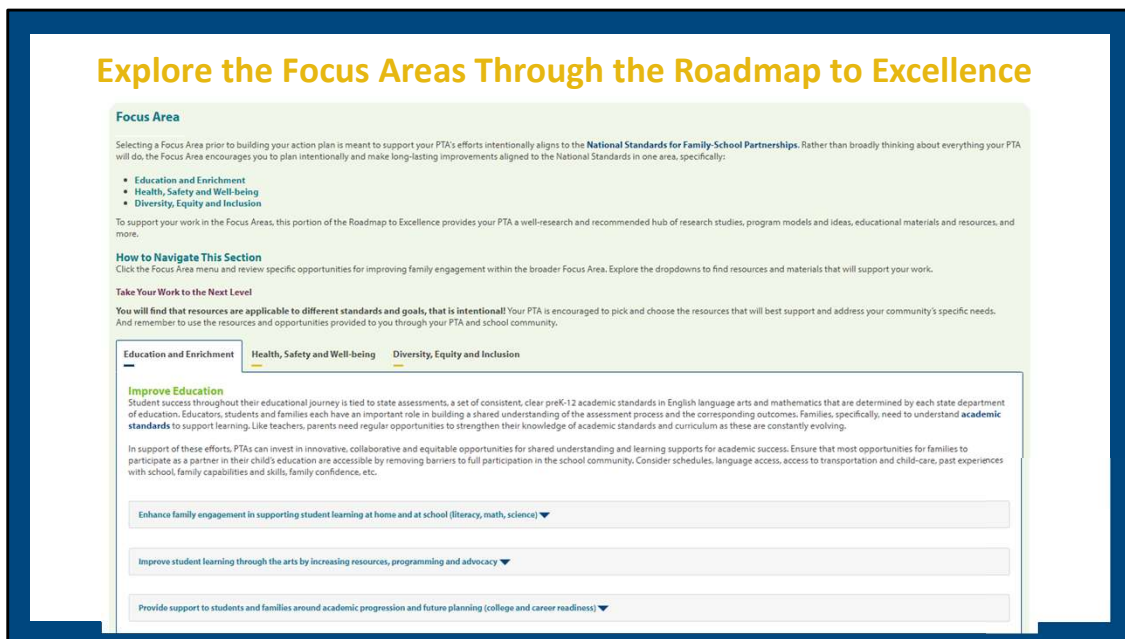
- Diversity leads to impactful programming through **respect for diverse experiences**.
- Inclusive communities are **welcoming spaces where everyone can work together** to improve student success.
- Equity in learning provides **fairness in opportunities and outcomes** so that *all* communities are successful.



**Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:** Mill Creek Elementary PTA in Washington focused on Standard 1: Welcoming Families and Standard 2: Communicate Effectively through efforts to improve and enhance diversity and inclusion in their community. Using individualized and community-specific communication strategies, the PTA, for the first time translated all materials into English and Spanish, and, recognizing a drastic increase in the number of Russian-speaking Ukrainian families, translated many materials into Russian, as well. They also began diversifying their communication strategies by working with teachers and the school to include PTA information in weekly and monthly newsletters, and by working with their district to take advantage of a new digital communication platform.

Mill Creek PTA further enhanced diversity and inclusion in their community by intentionally finding ways to welcome their LGBTQ+ families, while educating the larger community on the importance of acceptance and anti-bullying efforts. The PTA leaders began their work by including pronouns during zoom meeting and amending the language in their PTA documents and communications to be more inclusive. However, their efforts also focused on education and awareness building events, like an Anti-Bullying Spirit Day, to show their acceptance of LGBTQ+ students and families. All of their efforts were followed by debrief conversations around how to be more inclusive in the future and how to develop more community-specific communication methods.

The PTA also requested, and received permission, to put a pride flag on the front of the school, for the first time ever. to celebrate Pride Month. After a pride display at a local middle school was destroyed, the larger community specifically celebrated and thanked the PTA and elementary school's efforts to welcome LGBTQ+ families.



To help your PTA get started in each of the Focus Areas, we have compiled highly relevant resources from National PTA and collaborator organizations to guide your PTAs research, planning and implementation.

**Don't reinvent the wheel!** It is really easy to get lost or overwhelmed when tackling your focus area and action plan if you start from scratch. Make the work easier for you and your Excellence Team by exploring what National PTA outlines for each of the Focus Areas, conveniently broken down into specific actions or efforts your PTA can use in your action plan.

## Conclusion

### Step #2: Selecting Your Focus in the Program

- **Today we covered:**

- The reason you are selecting a Focus Area and Standard to explore in the program
- Tips, tricks and recommendations on how you and your Excellence Team can choose
- Examples of each Focus Area in-action, all based on real 2022-2023 Excellence Action Plans

**Thanks for tuning in for this Excellence Lesson.  
Email us at [Excellence@PTA.org](mailto:Excellence@PTA.org) for any questions!**

Stay tuned for future Excellence Lessons covering Step #3: **Build an Excellence Action Plan and Check Back with Your Community**. But in the interim, if you have any questions, be sure to email us at [Excellence@PTA.org](mailto:Excellence@PTA.org) for any questions. We are here to help! Good luck – Bye!