

COVID-19 RELIEF CASE STUDY

Distance Learning

Grant Relief for PTAs



NATIONAL PTA COVID-19 RELIEF SUMMARY

School communities faced an overwhelming level of need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this sustained moment of crisis, National PTA® was there—working for our nation’s students, families, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders. With funding from TikTok and other corporate partners, National PTA awarded \$1,385,000 in COVID-19 Relief Grants to local and regional PTAs across the country.

\$1,385,000

total dollars distributed to PTA
communities nationwide

538,000

people impacted

Distribution by Key Area



22.4%
Food Security



14.5%
Internet & Device Access

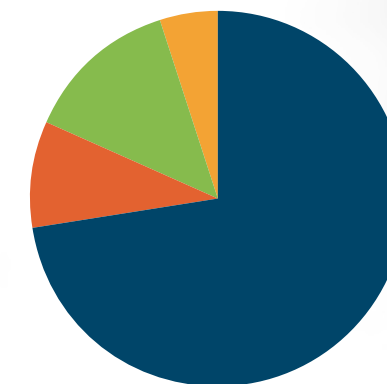


19.2%
Distance Learning



43.9%
Mental Health/Social and
Emotional Support

Distribution by School Level



72.7%
Elementary

13.4%
High

9.1%
Middle

4.8%
N/A (District/Council/
Region or State PTA)

DEEP DIVE

Paul Duke STEM High School PTSA: Norcross, Ga.

- ♦ **Public Title I school**
- ♦ **1,100 students enrolled**
- ♦ **68% of students receive free and reduced lunch**
- ♦ **51% of students come from Spanish-speaking families**
- ♦ **70% of students initially chose remote learning for the 2020-21 school year**
- ♦ **About 2/3 of students impacted by the National PTA COVID-19 Relief Grant**

Paul Duke STEM High School may only be a few years old, but it has already earned a reputation for collaboration and innovation. At this choice school in Gwinnett County, Georgia's largest school district, students from across the learning spectrum enroll in rigorous math and science courses and a wide range of college and career readiness programs. What's more, with their Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) at the school's center, Paul Duke prides itself on fostering a positive school culture where faculty, students and families thrive.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in spring 2020, school- and district-level leadership worked quickly to deliver meals to those in need, improve technology resources and lift the student body's spirits through social media. Paul Duke was uniquely positioned to acclimate to digital learning, as students were already eligible to work remotely, a privilege called "Flex Fridays."

However, science and technology are hands-on disciplines. Some students—particularly those whose families were struggling financially—were falling behind amid the isolation of full-time distance learning.



"We were really nervous about what it would mean for us. Because we're a STEM school, people looked to us to be a shining example as it relates to technology," says Tina Budnitz, 1st vice president of Paul Duke PTSA. "We knew we had to do this really well."

With a \$5,000 National PTA® COVID-19 Relief Grant, made possible by TikTok, Paul Duke PTSA was able to support its teachers as they reinvented the school's curriculum—and taught STEM in a whole new way.

THE PROBLEM

Without lab experiments, how would students visualize highly abstract concepts at home?

When Paul Duke PTSA met with Principal Jonathon Wetherington during summer 2020, they asked what was “keeping him up at night.” He confirmed that freshmen biology and physics courses presented the greatest challenge during distance learning. Many parents couldn’t provide instructional support for these foundational courses, which are required for students to graduate. Combined with the sheer exhaustion of sitting in front of a camera all day, school leaders feared Paul Duke’s youngest students would continue to struggle—and that it would spell trouble for their future academic success.

The PTSA wanted to improve students’ educational experiences in biology and physics. That became the primary focus of their National PTA grant for fall 2020,

when 70% of students chose to remain fully distanced. The science teachers already had plenty of ideas for adapting their lessons plans to engage both “roomers” and “Zoomers.” They just needed help bringing those lessons to life. Support from PTSA—in the form of money, time and effort—would make it possible.

“We are grateful National PTA gave us the flexibility to pivot and support the teachers and departments that needed the most help.”

– Tina Budnitz, PTSA leader



THE SOLUTION

Together, Paul Duke's PTSA and faculty landed on a solution: at-home science experiment kits to support distance learning in biology and physics.

PTSA volunteers managed all the logistics: purchasing the materials in bulk, translating information into Spanish, assembling the kits and arranging pick-up times for families. They also distributed STEM journals and class supplies for art, music and engineering.

Science Kit Snapshot:

- 640 at-home science kits distributed
 - Biology: diffusion and osmosis experiment supplies
 - Physics: Rube Goldberg machine kits demonstrating Newton's laws of motion and rotational movement
 - Kits differentiated by course section and level

Throughout the fall, students worked in virtual groups to complete the experiments, giving freshmen new to the school an opportunity to engage with their peers.

The science experiments were then extended to school-wide STEM competitions so student clubs, parents and siblings could also take part in exciting educational experiences. These kinds of activities contribute to Paul Duke's positive atmosphere, which improves student retention and ultimately graduation rates.

"The power of the PTA is that we're extenders. We help keep the community together. We can help teachers reach their curricular goals when they need an extra set of hands."

– Tina Budnitz, PTSA leader



ENGINEERING EXTENSION

Once school resumed in the fall, PTSA leaders became aware of another significant challenge resulting from COVID-19 restrictions.

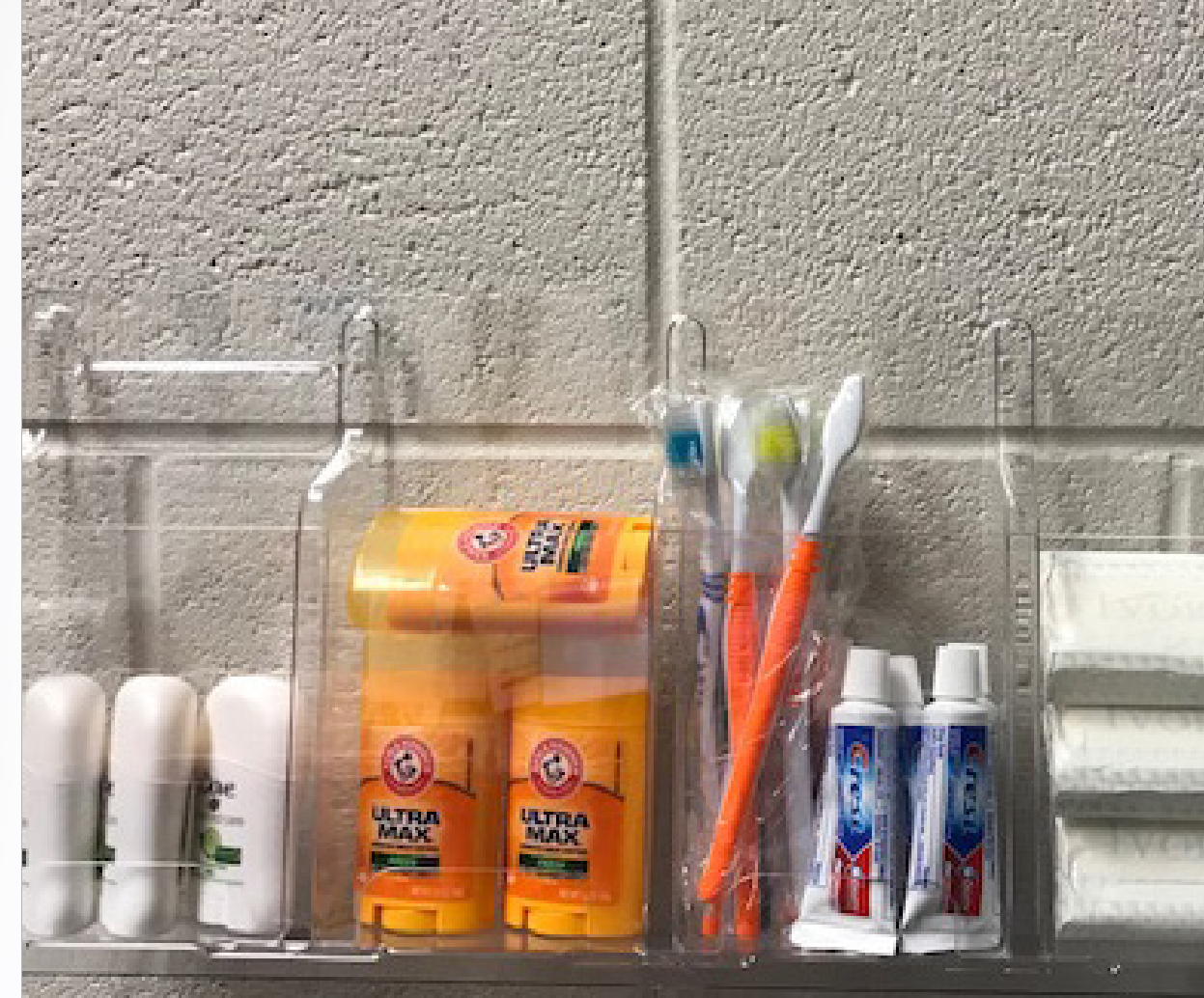
Paul Duke's engineering and mechatronics students typically work on group projects that require them to share industrial equipment in close quarters. Standard projects had become too logistically difficult with so many students learning remotely, due to the need for in-person social distancing.

The PTSA had \$1,747 remaining from purchasing the science kit supplies. They chose to reallocate this grant money to support the engineering department in ways that would interest students and benefit the greater community. These activities included:

→ **Expanded Maker Space:** Students redesigned and stocked this indoor space to be accessed by both in-person learners and digital learners after hours. They also came up with a safe way to organize large materials, such as lumber and sheet metal. Now teachers can differentiate instruction and allow students from various disciplines to complete or extend classroom projects into the maker space.

→ **Learning by Doing:** Engineering students designed and built their own CNC machine, a computerized device that allows you to program and automate machines and cutting tools. With the CNC machine they engraved dedication plaques for a forthcoming memory garden at the school.

→ **Outdoor Classroom:** Leveraging PTSA funds and the new CNC machine, engineering students also designed and built picnic tables for an outdoor classroom, then assembled them with assistance from the parent group Paul Duke Dads. The outdoor classroom now serves as a socially-distanced meeting place for other classes and student clubs. It was also the setting for Paul Duke's annual Family Trivia Night—a beloved tradition that otherwise would have been canceled during the pandemic.



Amid the pandemic, more and more Paul Duke students asked for help securing basic toiletries such as feminine pads, deodorant, soap, shampoo and conditioner. With remaining grant funds, the PTSA worked with the counseling office to stock school bathrooms with these personal care items. They also sent home grocery store gift cards for each of the school's homeless students.

→ **Snowman Extravaganza:** After Paul Duke lost a student, engineering and mechatronics teacher Stephen Cochran was inspired to plan a moment for the entire school community to reconnect. Students cut out dozens of 8-foot snow people, each adopted and decorated by a student club. A local company volunteered to help with the event lighting, even conducting an outdoor class on circuitry and wiring. This culminated in a community-wide Snowman Extravaganza on Dec. 11. Over 600 cars drove through to enjoy the lit-up snowmen, hear a live band and donate food for the local food pantry.

“With PTA funds on hand, I was able to say, ‘Yes, we can do that!’ We are grateful to National PTA for giving us the support we needed to reimagine and adapt our curriculum.”

– **Stephen Cochran, Co-Chair, Career and Technical Education (CTE) department**



Continued Momentum

Paul Duke PTSA went on to receive \$2,500 in continuation funding from National PTA and Mathnasium, a long-time funder in their school cluster. Paul Duke used the funds to host a Curriculum Hackathon where teachers presented their best innovations in distance education. They will later share these presentations with teachers throughout the county. The PTSA also holds bimonthly Saturday interventions for remote students to get additional support for missed or incomplete assignments, with as many as 130 students attending each session. “Paul Duke will reap the rewards of your support for many years. Thank you!” – Tina Budnitz, PTSA leader

STEM EDUCATION, REIMAGINED

Paul Duke STEM High School calls itself “a small school full of big ideas.”

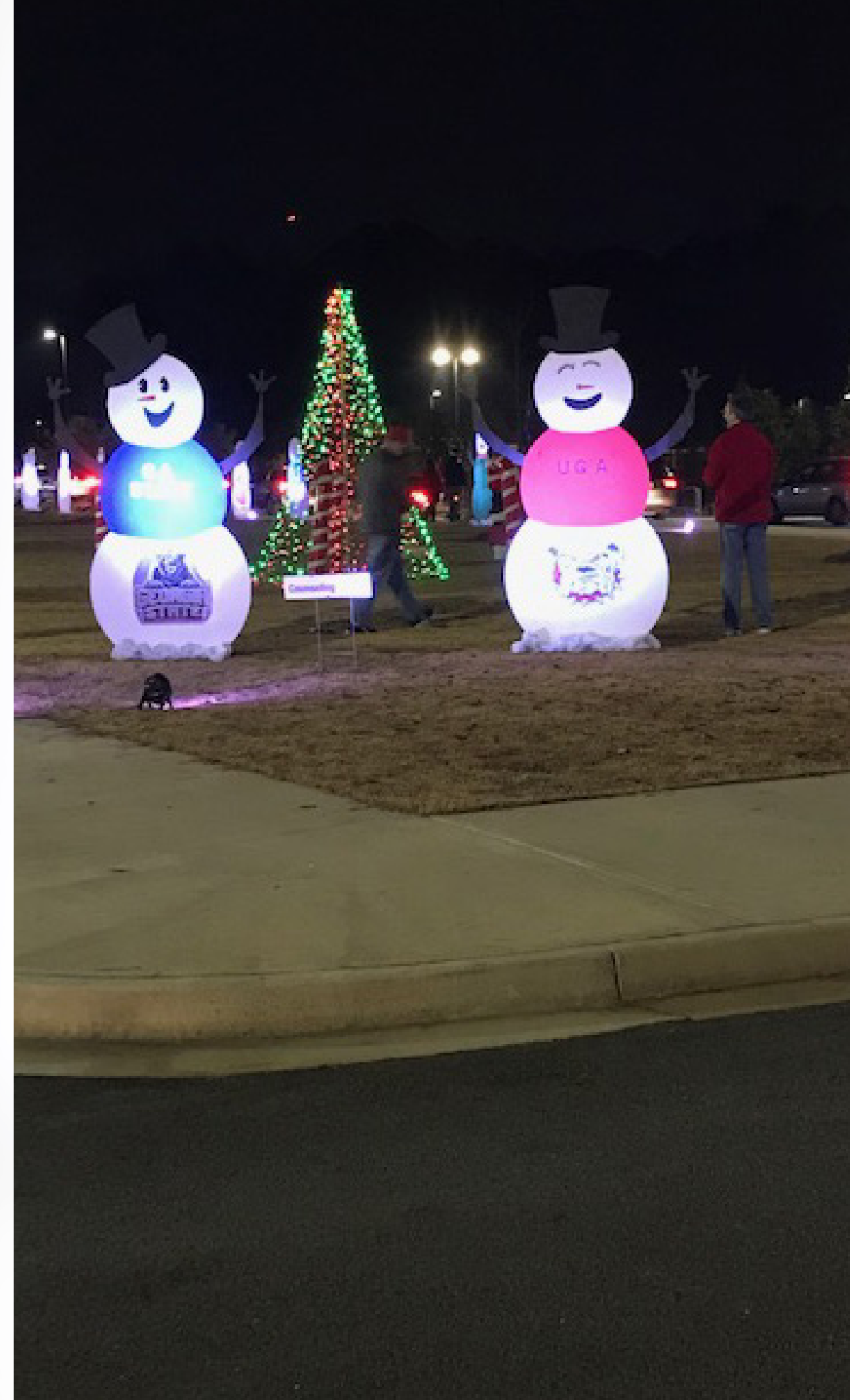
Thanks to the COVID-19 Relief Grant from National PTA and TikTok, the PTSA helped the faculty reimagine science and engineering instruction to be safe, engaging and effective for all learners amid the pandemic.

As Budnitz puts it, “Our yearbooks will show pictures of teachers, students and parents painting 8-foot snow people, building tables, picking up lunch and science kits and sharing a laugh in the middle of a really hard day. History will show that our local school took to heart the mission of PTA and stepped up to lead a collaborative effort between parents, teachers and our larger community to reach every child struggling to learn, engage and thrive during COVID-19.”

Simply put, Paul Duke was able to remain a STEM leader in the face of today’s extraordinary challenges—thanks in large part to the COVID-19 Relief Grant from National PTA and TikTok.

“It was always a bright spot, hearing these impact stories and talking with National PTA about the great work they were doing.... It brought it home that TikTok was really helping our neighbors, our friends, our colleagues, the people we see at religious services and sports, and so on.”

– Eric Ebenstein, Director of Public Policy, TikTok



Learn more about the power
of the PTA at **PTA.org**.



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