

# COVID-19 RELIEF CASE STUDY

## Food Security

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

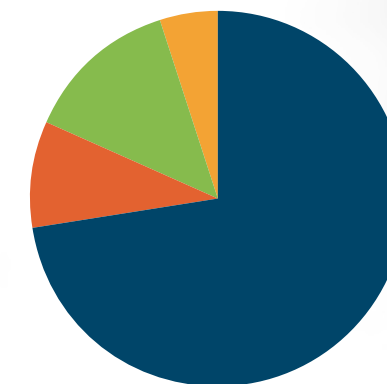


**19.2%**  
Distance Learning



**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

## Oak Grove Elementary School PTA: Bloomington, Minn.

- ♦ Public Title I school
- ♦ 418 students enrolled
- ♦ 41% White; 20% Black; 18% Hispanic/Latino; 11% Biracial; 9% Asian
- ♦ Over 50% of students receive free and reduced lunch

Oak Grove Elementary School is diverse, both culturally and socioeconomically. The community includes many students of color and immigrant families. Under the district's "open enrollment" policy, students come from all over the area to participate in Oak Grove's gifted and talented and autism programs.

As in any diverse community, there are "haves" and "have-nots." When Lisa Johnson became president of the Parent Teacher Association® (PTA) in 2018, she discovered that many students were not bringing snacks to school because their families didn't have enough money for food. Teachers bought food for students out of their own pockets, and custodians saved unopened breakfast and lunch items for children to take home in the evenings.

Johnson and her fellow PTA leaders recognized that Oak Grove students could not live up to their full potential if they are hungry. And so the PTA Pantry was born, a collaborative effort between the PTA and school staff to support economically disadvantaged and homeless students and ensure that all students have access to food. The pantry was entirely volunteer driven, with an operating budget of \$50 per month.

The COVID-19 pandemic—and the economic hardships that came with it—put food insecurity into much sharper focus for Oak Grove. Armed with a \$5,000 COVID-19 Relief Grant from National PTA and TikTok, the PTA was able to fill critical gaps for families in need.









# THE SOLUTION

“I am so thankful that my children are getting well fed at school so that they can learn well.”

– Oak Grove Parent

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Oak Grove PTA saw an opportunity to scale their already-successful PTA Pantry to help fight hunger.

Upon receiving the grant funds in August 2020, PTA leaders promptly got to work. Before, the pantry only had access to one shelf’s worth of storage space, plus any available room in the staff lounge refrigerator. They knew this wouldn’t be nearly enough to meet the new level of demand.

The PTA purchased two refrigerators and a large cabinet for the newly-expanded PTA Pantry.

They then stocked it with \$1,300 worth of food from a wholesale club—26 times what they would normally purchase in a month. They worked with staff member Laura Hoffman to coordinate delivery of these items, as parents couldn’t enter the school building during lockdown.

The PTA Pantry would be well stocked when students returned for part-time instruction in October. Today, about 47 Oak Grove students receive food from the pantry for themselves and their families each month.

“PTA will be remembered for providing the resources necessary for low-income and homeless students ... and providing the security of knowing that they would not go hungry.”

– Lisa Johnson, former PTA president





# FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Oak Grove PTA wanted to stretch their grant dollars to provide as much nutritional and emotional sustenance as possible. Students facing food insecurity typically don't have much choice when it comes to their meals. Now visitors to the PTA Pantry can look forward to high-protein beef and cheese sticks, nut butters, ravioli, soups, yogurt and fresh fruits and vegetables.

"Fresh produce is something those of us without food insecurity take for granted. A lot of these kids simply have no access to it," said Lisa Johnson, former PTA president.

There was room for fun in the budget, too. Pudding and name-brand cereal boxes have been a particularly big hit. During the brutally cold winter months, the PTA included instant hot cocoa mix and holiday cookies. The message: These students are as deserving of little pleasures as their more economically advantaged peers.

As Johnson puts it, such foods "feed the soul a little bit." One delighted third-grader said, "This is so great! We never get this anywhere else!"

## Meeting Other Needs

Food security was one of many issues facing the Oak Grove community in 2020. The PTA used the remaining COVID-19 Relief Grant funds to provide:

- 400 reusable water bottles (one for each student)
- Earbuds with microphones for students in need to participate in online classes
- Scholarships to offset the cost of home internet access
- Book replacements for the "Baggie Book" literacy-building program targeting early readers and English language learners

From,



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## Exchange for Good

Once the expanded PTA Pantry was underway, PTA leaders looked beyond food security. This was the genesis of a request/needs exchange. Oak Grove families in need can request specific items—everything from a bed to a car seat to size 6 clothing.

The PTA uses its digital platforms to spread the word. Families in a position to help can then donate the requested items, and the school social worker helps with distribution. "At Oak Grove, we have a sense of community and responsibility to look out for one another. Once we start something, we can usually maintain and grow it with donations from within the community," Johnson says.



# FEEDING THEIR POTENTIAL

Students who are hungry cannot learn. Because of the COVID-19 Relief Grant from National PTA and TikTok, the Oak Grove PTA could provide much-needed food to families throughout 2020. This helped alleviate stress for parents who struggle to put food on the table and improved students' ability to engage in their academics.

And they did it entirely with volunteers, so 100% of the grant funds went to helping their beloved community. "I think the grant money ends up helping more than just the child," says Bavier. "It helps the teachers. It helps the parents. And when the stress levels go down at home, that affects the whole community."

"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**

If you or someone you know is in need of food assistance, **find your local food bank at [FeedingAmerica.org](https://www.feedingamerica.org)**.



## Continued Momentum

Oak Grove PTA's COVID-19 relief work is just beginning. They went on to receive \$2,500 in continuation funding from National PTA and Mathnasium to address mental health. They've invested in a new library of children's books. As Bavier puts it, "I'm hoping that students can see themselves in these books. That they can know that things have been written for them, it increases their feelings of worth and love."



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



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