

# COVID-19 RELIEF CASE STUDY

## Reducing Vaccine Hesitancy

January 2022-March 2023

With support from the HHS COVID-19 Public Education Campaign ("We Can Do This")



# **PTA: A POWERFUL LEADER, A TRUSTED VOICE**

## **REDUCING VACCINE HESITANCY ONE COMMUNITY AT A TIME**

**When our children returned to school,  
National PTA jumped into action.**

Beginning in January 2022, PTA volunteers across 14 states mobilized to bring COVID-19 vaccine clinics and information to local communities, supporting a healthy return to in-person education.

As a lead partner in the national We Can Do This Campaign, National PTA has shown what is possible when our powerful network shows up for families, one community at a time.





# WE CAN DO THIS (...AND WE DID)

“Zip code should not predict health access,” says Michelle Smith, a PTA leader in Texas Northwest Independent School District. That’s exactly what we believe. In 2022, National PTA joined a nationwide effort to reduce COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, partnering with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in an urgent push to reach families who, for a variety of reasons, had not yet secured vaccines for themselves and their children.

We were tapped for this role because we’re a trusted on-the-ground presence in school communities across every state. National PTA has a 125-year history of advocacy for children and families, including an extensive COVID relief activation during the peak of the pandemic.

In a few short weeks, we mobilized in dozens of communities with low vaccine uptake, bringing factual and culturally sensitive information to support families’ decision-making. That initial push expanded into an 18-month effort that has made a notable impact on both vaccine uptake and PTA strength nationally.

We’re grateful to HHS for fueling this important effort and to our tireless and innovative PTA leaders who showed up again and again, saying, *We can do this*.

“By working with trusted community partners who serve a diverse range of community members, such as the National PTA, we can meet people where they are and help ensure that people feel confident making informed decisions about their health.”

—Dr. Vivek Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General

**18**  
months

**\$560,000**  
distributed

**444**  
community events

**12,757+**  
vaccinations\*

\* This figure captures only reported vaccine doses from PTA-hosted events. It is an undercount of our total impact.



# PTA'S POWERFUL NATIONAL NETWORK

The We Can Do This vaccination initiative tapped into National PTA's greatest strength: our nimble and passionate network of advocates. We activated quickly, moving critical funding and information into communities where vaccination rates had lagged and bringing an urgent public health campaign to scale in just weeks.

Participating PTAs received grants of \$5,000 and up to cultivate vaccine confidence via three overarching strategies:

1. **Sharing reliable information:** National PTA curated quality, scientifically sound resources for target communities, and local PTA leaders leveraged a range of communications channels (e.g., social media, e-newsletters, flyers, phone calls, events) to share information in the languages and manner most accessible to their communities.
2. **Facilitating community conversations:** PTA leaders hosted conversations about vaccines online, in schools and out in the community. These judgment-free conversations allowed parents to ask questions;

share concerns; and receive accurate, culturally attuned information from trusted local health providers.

3. **Hosting and supporting vaccine clinics:** PTAs partnered with schools, local nonprofits, health departments, faith-based organizations and others to lead family-friendly vaccination clinics. The events were designed to remove barriers to vaccination (e.g., time, transportation), address lingering questions, share additional health resources and build community.

**"The key here is just to remember you're not in this alone."**

**—Dr. Sandy Chung, President, American Academy of Pediatrics**



A fun kickoff to the new school year!

## MCPS Back-to-School Fair

Maryland's Largest School District  
**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
*Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential*

### RESOURCES YOU NEED TO NAVIGATE THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

## SATURDAY, AUG. 27, 2022 10 AM - 1 PM

Event is a wonderful opportunity for families to learn about the school system, county programs and services, while enjoying free giveaways, children's activities and more.

[www.MCPSbacktoschoolfair.org](http://www.MCPSbacktoschoolfair.org)

The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services will host a free COVID-19 vaccination clinic.

## Westfield

f @WestfieldWheaton



# THIS IS HOW WE PTA

For over 18 months, our PTA network delivered thousands of vaccinations to students, families and community members through coordinated state and local action. We reached many thousands more through conversations and community events.

**19** PTAs  
**15** clinics  
**15** community conversations  
**1,128** vaccinations

- February 2: Webinar: Take Action to Keep Kids Safely in School (Hosted by National PTA and the U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services)
- February 12: First community clinic in Norman, Oklahoma

**January-February  
2022**

**22** PTAs  
**141** clinics  
**20** community conversations  
**3,334** vaccinations

**July-September  
2022**

**March-June 2022**

**31** PTAs  
**128** clinics  
**38** community conversations  
**2,566** vaccinations

- May 18: Virtual Townhall: How Families Can Navigate Today's COVID-19 Environment

- June 17: National Symposium: Maximizing In-Person Learning

**October  
2022-March 2023**

**35** PTAs  
**148** clinics  
**20** community conversations  
**4,974** vaccinations





## Maximizing In-Person Learning... Together

During National PTA's 125th Anniversary Convention, we hosted a symposium to discuss how PTAs can address vaccine hesitancy; support COVID testing at schools; and promote other strategies that ensure the health and safety of children, families and school staff. The live and live-streamed event included conversations with the U.S. Surgeon General and U.S. Secretary of Education and other national leaders in children's health and mental health. Nearly 350 PTA leaders attended the live event.

"We all want our children to feel emotional safety so that they can feel physical safety. You don't get to physical safety unless you have emotional safety."

— **Dr. Tim Shriver, Co-Founder and Board Chair, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning; Chairman, Special Olympics International; Co-Founder, UNITE**





# FIRST STEP: CONVERSATIONS

## Local dialogue...

The first step in nurturing vaccine confidence: conversation. Local PTA volunteers drew on their knowledge of their own communities to create opportunities for informed dialogue about vaccines. Through newsletters, social media posts, Zoom calls, community partnerships and one-on-one conversations, local PTA units served as trusted messengers, providing quality, scientific information in the language and formats that made the most sense in their communities. PTA leaders also created opportunities for families to have their questions addressed by local pediatricians and health experts, sometimes over multiple conversations.

The end goal was to support families in making the best decisions for themselves and their children based on solid, vetted information, rather than pushing vaccines on unwilling recipients.

## ...meets national conversation

At the same time that PTA grantees were sharing resources and hosting community conversations, National PTA hosted network-wide conversations to support them. During monthly community-of-practice calls with our public health consultant, local and state PTA leaders met to problem solve, share best practices and develop effective outreach strategies for their communities. These virtual sessions covered an array of important topics, from using data and community partnerships to reach the highest-need populations, to finding the right vaccination provider and creating incentives to draw families to clinics and events. They also discussed how to support PTA leaders' well-being while doing this important and often tiring work.



“Alabama has a high vaccine hesitancy rate. I felt like I was contributing to the health of our communities by sharing facts to those that had not made a decision based on facts, but instead on rumors.”

—Deborah Stern, Treasurer, Alabama PTA



GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

# PTAS ARE THE CORNERSTONE

## Adams Elementary School PTA Norman, Okla.

When National PTA first announced the We Can Do This grants, Christel Wesley of Norman, Okla. jumped on the opportunity. As a parent, teacher and PTA President at Adams Elementary School, Wesley felt the urgency of addressing vaccine barriers in her community.

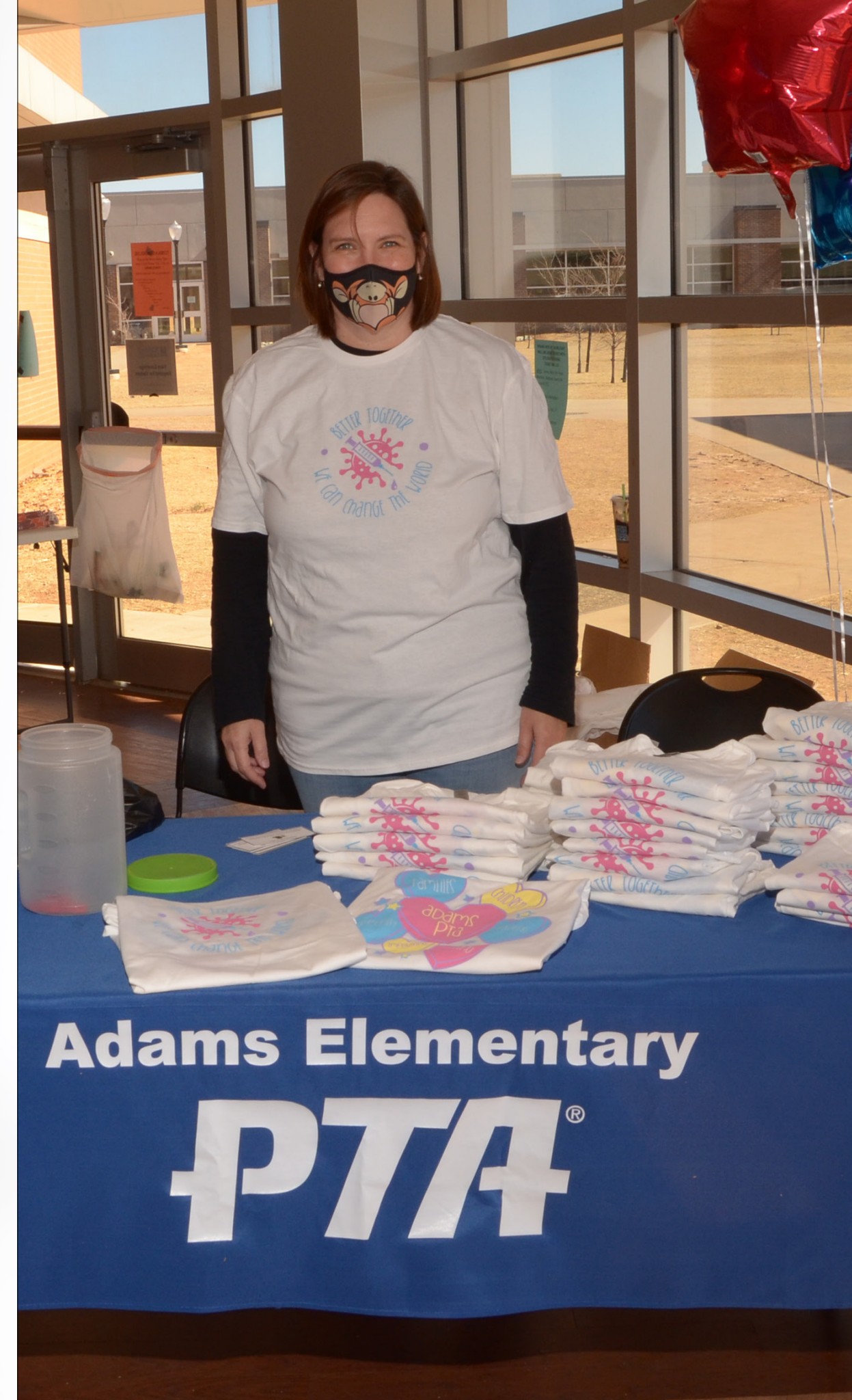
“In a classroom of 26, we only had eight kids coming to school because they didn’t feel safe... or had been in contact with someone that maybe got it. There were still so many things not known,” Wesley remembers. “We knew we had to do something, to be part of that solution.”

With no time to waste, Wesley got in touch with her district and a regional vaccine provider, IMMY Labs, to schedule a clinic. She then worked with her principal, district leaders and town health department to get

bilingual flyers out to families. Two weeks later, Adams Elementary PTA hosted the first vaccine clinic in our network.

Wesley and her team had two goals: (1) to share reliable information about COVID vaccines that would help resolve misconceptions out in the community and (2) to create a fun, friendly event where kids and families could get vaccinated together.

The team put a lot of thought into event details, selecting an accessible location at a neighboring high school and using grant funds and discounts from local vendors to provide popcorn, drinks and other goodies to everyone who attended. Every child received \$25 in PTA Bucks to spend at the onsite “toy store.”





Those touches paid off. “Not one kid screamed, cried or anything,” says Wesley. “They’ve got their snack; they’re ready to go.”

The environment felt safe for parents too. Wesley knew that many caregivers didn’t have a regular physician. At the event, they could make an appointment with a local pediatrician who would respond to their questions. They could then decide to sign up for a shot, but there was no pressure. “It was okay with us if you chose not to get a vaccination,” says Wesley, “as long as you walked away with more information than when you came in the door.”

All in all, 77 children received a COVID-19 vaccination that day, and 223 adults got shots too—several times the number IMMY Labs distributes during a typical clinic.

There were other positive outcomes too: About a dozen community members volunteered to join the PTA, including a local grandmother, and a whole host of collaborators—from the district’s leaders to the school’s own nurses—suddenly saw the PTA in a new light. “Through this event, they were able to see that we are still relevant, we are able to do the work. I feel like our school now looks to us as a first option instead of the last,” says Wesley.

That reputation inspired additional collaborations, including two more clinics; information campaigns about booster shots and preventative hygiene practices; and a special clinic in nearby Oklahoma City that helped low-income seniors get their shots..

When discussing PTA’s value, Wesley shared that when there is a need, PTA is always available and ready saying, “PTAs are the cornerstone. This is what we do.”

“This partnership with Adams Elementary School PTA was more than we ever imagined. This is what we were looking for to reach the community in a more effective way. We now understand the power of PTA.”

—IMMY Labs

**300**  
vaccines distributed

**488**  
students

**44%** White   **32%** Latino   **4%** Black   **3%** Indigenous   **2%** Asian

**67%**  
free/reduced lunch



GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

# STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY STATEWIDE

## New Mexico PTA

New Mexico PTA joined the We Can Do This campaign in the fall of 2022 as the focus shifted to adults over 50. This age group was of particular concern in New Mexico, which has the highest rate of children being raised by grandparents as well as the oldest teaching force in the country.

“Students were telling us, again and again, how worried they were about infecting their elders,” recalls Renata Witte, New Mexico PTA’s Vice President for Legislation and Advocacy. With school campuses recently reopened to families, it was the right moment to start organizing clinics.

New Mexico PTA took a whole-family, full-service approach to increasing vaccination uptake. They established relationships with two vaccine partners, and schools could choose their preferred provider to host an on-site clinic that would offer COVID vaccines along with flu and pneumonia shots and, in some cases, other childhood immunizations on which families had fallen behind. The goal was to eliminate vaccine barriers for busy families by offering an array of vaccinations on the same day and in the same location.

Importantly, New Mexico PTA framed the vaccinations as an opportunity, rather than a mandate or cure-all. “We’re offering the opportunity,” Witte told any local partners who expressed doubts. “Whether you choose to take advantage, that’s your family’s choice.”





Many families grabbed the opportunity. Alyssa Romine, PTA President at Collet Park Elementary in Albuquerque, reflects: “For most of our families, there were two challenging things about accessing the vaccine: time and money. We made it really simple. You could bring all the kids if you needed to and get them all their shots instead of making all those appointments.”

Within two weeks, the New Mexico PTA network had exceeded its vaccination goal. By December, local PTAs had hosted a total of 10 clinics and delivered 931 vaccinations.

In addition to supporting family and community health, the campaign helped strengthen New Mexico’s entire PTA network. Some local units regained their PTA status by filing the paperwork required to receive a grant. Many surprised their communities (and themselves) by stepping into a new form of advocacy.

“PTA is more than just selling chocolate,” says Witte, “For some PTAs, to be able to offer a community service where nothing was asked in return was a great growth lesson.”

Inspired by their impact, New Mexico’s PTA leaders plan to continue the work. Some local PTAs will host more full-service vaccine clinics at the start of the school year, and the state PTA leadership is building on its new relationship with the New Mexico Department of Health to share information about childhood vaccines statewide. New Mexico PTA was also invited to work with the New Mexico Department of Education to set up a vaccine weekend for homeless children across the state.

“I hadn’t anticipated that there would be continued work on the state level,” says Witte. “That’s a really good thing.”

**“I feel proud that we were able to get vaccines out for parents that otherwise have a hard time. It was nice to see that the whole family came. They could see that the school was welcoming and trying to help.”**

**—Fatima Ceballos, PTA Vice President, Coral Community Charter School**

**18**  
months

**\$560K**  
distributed

**444**  
community events

**12.7K**  
vaccinations\*

\* This figure captures only reported vaccine doses from PTA-hosted events. It is an undercount of our total impact.

**“I’m excited that we were able to help spread information and provide opportunities that weren’t there before. That’s what we’re here for.”**

**—Tami Baker, President, New Mexico PTA**



GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

# UNIMAGINABLE IMPACT

## Montgomery County Council of PTAs, Rockville, Md.

Montgomery County Council of PTAs has hosted more vaccine events—and helped get more shots in arms—than any other PTA in our network. And the work is still going strong. Montgomery County’s most recent community health fair drew 840 in-person attendees and another 1,000 online. County leaders are paying attention, as are regional media, with everyone asking: How have you made it all happen?

For Laura Mitchell, Vice President of Advocacy for the Montgomery County Council of PTAs, it wasn’t entirely new work. Her team received a grant from National PTA in 2019 to address mental health during the COVID-19 shutdown. In early 2022, when many families were still afraid to send their children to school and information about vaccines was uneven, Mitchell and a fellow

volunteer organized free, multilingual, virtual events to answer families’ questions. Joining the We Can Do This campaign was the logical next step, allowing Montgomery County to bring its vaccine outreach to the next level.

“We thought this was going to be two weeks in the beginning,” says Mitchell. “And then it turned into two months, and then almost two years. This grant has parlayed into unimaginable things.”

Montgomery County is the largest school district in Maryland, spanning cities, suburbs and rural areas and 152 language groups. Local vaccination rates varied dramatically in 2022 for a variety of reasons. Many families struggled to find accessible appointments.





Polarized politics and misinformation increased vaccine hesitancy in some communities.

To address this range of obstacles, Mitchell and her team devised a two-prong strategy. First, they would set up school-based clinics at optimal hours for working families, making appointments available to public school families first. Then, they would arrange Zoom calls a few days prior, in the languages spoken at home. On the calls, families could get their questions answered by a local doctor, and then absorb the information before committing to an appointment.

“They got to ask their questions. It wasn’t just us telling them,” Mitchell says, “or a recorded webinar with a doctor they didn’t know. We intentionally chose doctors from the community.”

The clinics were designed to be welcoming and fun: Children received toys, coloring books and snacks, adults got grocery gift cards and parents could play games with their kids while they waited. “We realized that if we made that a fun memory,” Mitchell explains, “they were more likely to return for that second shot.”

Initially, clinics occurred on weekends and Wednesdays, with two or three schools hosting a clinic each day. By the campaign’s second phase, the schedule expanded to Mondays through Thursdays. At the peak, Montgomery County Council of PTAs hosted dozens of rotating clinics

per month, using vaccination rate data to reach each of the county’s highest-need communities.

As of spring 2023, Montgomery County still hosts Saturday clinics and has also launched a series of larger health fairs that include vaccines, health information tables, food trucks, yoga and meditation activities, carnival-style prizes and more. Montgomery County PTA partners with the school district, county health department and a range of community and faith-based organizations to run these large events. “Everybody has coalesced around this,” says Mitchell. “It’s the ultimate in collaboration.”

“The vaccines were extremely important, but what it mushroomed into was so much bigger,” says Mitchell. “It’s really helped to rebuild the goodwill of our PTAs in our county, and now other counties are coming to our forums to learn.”

**“I think we’ve surprised a lot of people...  
Our focus on health has benefitted the  
students and raised our PTA advocacy  
game to a new level.”**

**—Laura Mitchell, Vice President of Advocacy,  
Montgomery County Council of PTAs**

**202**  
clinics

**4**  
community events

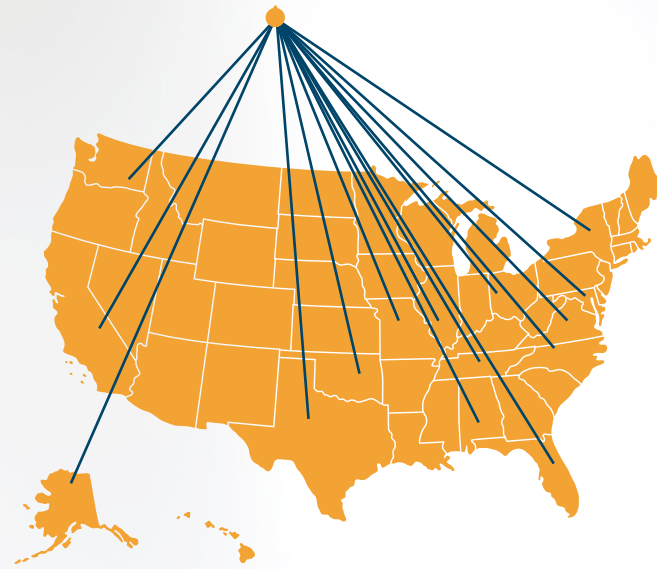
**9.4K+**  
vaccines reported

Montgomery County Public Schools

- 210 schools (largest district in Maryland)
- 497 square miles
- 160,554 students
- 34.6% Latino, 24.4% White, 21.8% Black, 13.9% Asian, 5.1% Multi-racial
- 39.8% free/reduced lunch



# WE CAN DO THIS GRANTEES



## Participating PTAs

Alabama State PTA

Alaska State PTA

Adams Hill Elementary; San Antonio, Texas

Adams Elementary PTA; Norman, Okla.

Bethesda Elementary; Durham, N.C.

Berea PTA Council; Berea, Ohio

Berea Midpark High School PTSA; Berea, Ohio

B.M. Williams Primary; Chesapeake, Va.

Campbell Middle School PTA; Smyrna, Ga.

Chesapeake Council; Chesapeake, Va.

Clara Love ES PTA; Justin, Texas

Crestwood Intermediate; Chesapeake, Va.

Cumberland County District PTA Council;  
Fayetteville, N.C.

Delalio PTA; Jacksonville, N.C.





Durham Council of PTAs; Durham, N.C.

Forest Ridge Elementary School; Laurel, Md.

Guilford County PTA Council; Greensboro, N.C.

Johnston County PTA Council; Smithfield, N.C.

Jones High School PTSA; Orlando, Fla.

Lawrence Number 2 School; Inwood, N.Y.

Little Run Elementary; Fairfax, Va.

Loftis Elementary; Hixson, Tenn.

Lowe's Grove Vikings PTA; Durham, N.C.

Male Engagement Network Community PTA;  
Charlotte, N.C.

Martha Lake Elementary School; Lynnewood, Wash.

Mary E Cunningham Elementary; Austin, Texas

McDonnell Elementary PTA Huntsville; Huntsville, Ala.

Miami Dade County Council; Miami, Fla.

Montgomery County Council; Rockville, Md.

Network of Families Community PTA; Clarkton, N.C.

New Mexico State PTA

North Carolina State PTA

Northwest ISD Council of PTAs; Justin, Texas

Oak Grove Elementary; Bloomington, Minn.

Ocoee High School PTSA; Ocoee, Fla.

Orange County Council of PTAs; Orange County, Fla.

Orlo Vista Elementary School PTA; Orlando, Fla.

Palomar Council of PTAs; San Diego, Calif.

Paramount Unified School District; Paramount, Calif.

Parkwood Elementary PTA; Durham, N.C.

Pearsontown Elementary School PTA; Durham, N.C.

Penn-Griffin School for the Arts; High Point, N.C.

Ren-West Community PTA; Charlotte, N.C.

Rogers Herr Magnet Middle PTA; Durham, N.C.

Rollings Hills Elementary School PTA; Huntsville, Ala.

Ruth Oliver Walker Elementary; Florissant, Mo.

Sanders Elementary School; Austell, Ga.

School for Creative Studies PTSA; Durham, N.C.

Solar Prep for Boys; Dallas, Texas

University High School PTSA; Orlando, Fla.

Urbana High School; Urbana, Ill.

Washington Middle School PTA; La Habra, Calif.

Washington State PTA



# WE *DID* THIS... TOGETHER

National PTA is grateful for the contributions of local and state PTA leaders who prioritized the health of their communities and took on challenging new roles in a time of urgent need. We're thankful, too, to our funders and the many partners who placed trust in our leadership and walked alongside us in cultivating health and safety in school communities.

We did this, thanks to you.

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**National PTA gratefully acknowledges the opportunity to serve as a funded community partner on the HHS COVID-19 Public Education Campaign ("We Can Do This") led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**





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



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