Emerging Minority Leaders
Alumni Success Stories
Dear PTA Leader,

The current focus in National PTA on diversity and minority leadership began during the term of Lois Jean White (National PTA President 1997–99). She promoted the Urban Initiative, supported a PTA program called Walk A Mile in My Shoes and had a partnership with Ebony magazine. Shirley Igo (National PTA President 2001–2003) continued this emphasis in her term with the Hispanic Initiative. Jan Harp Domene (National PTA President 2007–2009) was an active participant in this program, as California was one of the targeted states of the initiative while she was in a leadership position of the California State PTA. Shirley and Jan formed a strong friendship while working on this project. They both recognized the importance of involving all parents in the education of their children.

During my term as president, Jan and I worked with Warlene Gary, who was the National PTA CEO at the time, to develop an ongoing initiative to promote leadership among minority PTA members and to encourage them to take on leadership roles in their own PTAs, as well as at State and National levels of PTA. On October 27, 2006, the first Minority Leader’s Conference was held in Detroit, MI.

When Jan took over after my term as National PTA president ended, she continued to support PTA-sponsored Minority Leadership Conferences. She also worked to include minority leadership at all levels of PTA, identifying and helping minority leaders to rise to State and National leadership positions. She recruited at-large National PTA board members so the National board was reflective of the diversity of our entire membership.

Jan was always passionate about including and involving parents who found it difficult to become involved or who did not always feel welcome in PTA. Those groups included military families, dads and families of color. As a native of New York and longtime resident of California, Jan recognized the challenges of minority families. She was a great connector. Everywhere she went Jan knew someone and brought them into the PTA family. Her values are reflected in the lives of her children, who have adopted minority children. She often showed us pictures of her multi-cultural family, which enjoyed the benefit of her love and devotion as a grandmother. I am sure Jan is smiling down upon all of us, not so much for honoring her by naming the Diversity and Inclusion Award after her, but for continuing the effort to include every parent of every child in our one voice.

Anna Weselak
National PTA President 2005-2007
My name is Angela (Angie) Carey. I currently serve on the Missouri PTA Board of Managers. I first attended an Emerging Minority Leaders Conference in 2013 in Arlington, VA. When EMLC is labeled as a powerful experience by National PTA, they’re not kidding. My experience was just that.

For me, EMLC was an opportunity to reflect on PTA’s history and connect and network with leaders from across the country. If I had only known how wonderful our main keynote speaker, Dr. Calvin Mackie, was going to be, I would have flipped open my iPad to record the entire speech. It was his own life story of having low grades and SAT scores. He talked about the great mentors in his life and the way he grew his career due to the “hope” that was instilled in him that he could do better and be better. His story inspired many of us to keep working hard to be inclusive of all children and never give up on the idea that all of them can succeed.

The closing session focused on Cultural Competency: Exploring the Visible and Invisible Aspects of Culture. One learning that I will never forget came in the form of a comment from someone who I would have referred to as Hispanic. She said, “Hispanic is a government name that is not embracing my true culture. If you want to embrace my true culture and respect me, you would say Latina or Latino.” I quickly took this back to my day job to have them revise our cultural meetings to replace Hispanic with Latino/a. Different people in the room also shared how in their culture, families did not “interact with school” or they were considered to be “interrupting education.” So it’s a different concept to be “engaged with the school community” living in America.

The most moving moment of Sunday morning was right at my own table . . . we were asked to discuss the question “How did growing up at the time you did shape your personality traits and your view of the world?” Including myself there were six of us and we couldn’t have been more diverse. There was a lady from the Philippines and her daughter from Denver; it was great to hear their student vs. mom perspective on things. There was a lady from just outside Manhattan, who was a ballerina until the age of 30. There was an African-American lady who grew up in rural Anchorage, AK. There was a Caucasian lady who grew up on the West Coast, married to a Midwestern husband. There was Midwestern born and raised in St. Louis, me. But at the end of our stories, the last woman to speak said, “I hate to do these types of exercises, I do not know my family. I was trafficked from the age of 5 to 22.” She had to say it twice before we all had processed what she was saying and just all began to sob, to know someone could survive such a horrific childhood and still be a caring PTA leader, volunteering and devoting her time to advocate on the behalf of every child. We began to make resolutions for change and ways to find “inclusivity” for all within PTA. We vowed to go back home and work harder to be better than ever before.

It was a phenomenal, life-changing weekend. I am so blessed to have attended.

Thank you,

Angie Carey

Member, Missouri PTA Board of Managers
My name is C. Andre’ Daniels. I reside in Westampton Township, NJ. My current position with PTA is parental engagement chair and I have been a PTA volunteer for 16 years. I first attended an Emerging Minority Leaders Conference in Detroit in 2006; the very first National PTA EMLC.

I remember first being asked to attend a new initiative started by National PTA known as The Emerging Minority Leaders Council by then New Jersey PTA President Harry Capers. As a veteran of the Air Force who understood diversity and inclusion programs, at first I was taken aback that I would need some sort of special leadership matriculation to be an advocate within PTA. I had openly opined that I thought I was a progressive leader who had some demonstrated capacities, who supported diversity and inclusion programs across a broad spectrum and the fact that I was African American should not require I need specialized training to be a leader in the world's oldest and largest advocacy organization for our children and youth.

Upon attending the Detroit EMLC I quickly learned that as an association we needed to move in a direction of greater awareness and understanding of everyone across the cultural divide. Looking back, I would credit the following individuals who along the way would benchmark and crystallize my involvement in PTA: Harry Capers and Lynne Morris, Jan Harp Domene, Chuck Saylor, Betsy Landers, Otha Thornton and Aurelio Montemayor, to name a few.

Each day offers unique challenges. Some of my greatest challenges have come from within PTA, with some not wanting to either be as inclusive as they could or should and yet others offering a climate that perhaps PTA shouldn't be inclusive at all. In all instances my resolve has always been to seek common ground on behalf of all children and youth, even in the midst of real or perceived conflict. I have unquestionably grown as a leader and my experiences as a result of National PTA's EMLC. It has not only emboldened my resolve as a leader committed to advancing the best interests of all children, but has also given me insights that have proven helpful as NJPTA's parental engagement chair and as the mayor of my community. Perhaps John Lennon captured it best in his critically acclaimed song, "Imagine" when he sang, “You may say I'm a dreamer, But I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us and the world will be as one!”

Thank You,

C. Andre’ Daniels
Former National PTA Board Member
NJPTA Parental Engagement Chair
My name is Rita Erves. I reside in Atlanta, GA. My current position with PTA is Immediate Past President, Georgia PTA, and I have been a PTA volunteer for over 20 years. I first attended an Emerging Minority Leaders Conference held on October 17–18, 2008 in Savannah, GA.

Of all of my PTA experiences over the years, my first EMLC was one of the most impactful and memorable ones. It was hosted by the Georgia PTA, and it led to my meeting the individual that became one of my dearest friends and my PTA mentor, Georgia PTA President Leslie Cushman. It was at this conference that I also met another individual that became a mentor to me, Jan Harp Domene, who at the time was serving as National PTA President.

Among the dynamic speakers that we were privileged to have at this conference were Leslie, Jan, Dr. Norman Thomas (Georgia PTA’s first African-American male president) and Dr. Karen Dade, education department chair at Spelman College and National PTA board member. It made such an impact on me to hear Jan address how vital it is to make a concentrated effort to truly open the door to new groups of people; to communicate effectively with them and then to exhibit the utmost respect for their input and what they bring to the PTA table.

I distinctly remember repeatedly hearing the words “reach out” and “strive hard to understand the diversity of our respective communities.” I learned that diversity involves accepting the fact that one size does not fit all. This information was drilled into my mind, and I carried it close to my heart when I returned to my home PTA community in my volunteer role as a council president. I still have two photos from this Conference that are very dear to me. One is a group picture captioned, “First Graduating Class of the Georgia PTA Emerging Minority Leadership Conference.”

Both Jan and Leslie had a way of being very direct when talking about diversity. I appreciated the fact that they never sugar-coated the real problems that develop within the PTA when trying to foster diverse representation in not only engaging members, but also making sure that there is a place at the table for diversity in leadership roles. They openly made no bones about the fact that it is challenging to attract and engage parents of all backgrounds. But they emphasized that we must try.

I feel so privileged, blessed and fortunate to have been in attendance at that EMLC, and I made sure that it was not my last. My most recent one was in October 2013. Leslie and Jan stuck by me in the years following my first conference and were the best mentors I could have ever had. These two ladies were the epitome of what diversity of thought really is, and it was always reflected in all of their great works within our Association. I was so happy to have Jan in Atlanta, GA., with me in July 2011, when I ran from the floor for Georgia PTA President-Elect and was elected.

Thank you,

Rita Erves
Former Georgia PTA President
My name is Aneeka Ferrell. I currently reside in Washington State. However, I was previously a resident of Louisville, KY, and that is where I began my PTA/PTSA journey and involvement.

I have held numerous local, district and state positions with PTA that have included president, secretary, 2nd vice president of membership, diversity consultant and state diversity chairperson, to name a few. My current position with PTA is family and community engagement chair. I have been a PTA volunteer for 22 years.

I first attended and participated in an Emerging Minority Leaders Conference in October 2012 in Washington DC. During this time, Common Core State Standards were just being rolled out and Kentucky was the first state to implement and test on the standards. As a Kentucky resident and expert on the topic, I was offered the opportunity to give a presentation at EMLC about the Common Core State Standards. Having a chance to meet with minority PTA volunteers from across the U.S. was so rewarding. Oftentimes, minorities are not as present in PTAs as other groups; to see minorities at a conference that focused on issues related to them and their experiences was amazing and inspiring.

In October 2013, I was invited back to the EMLC to conduct another presentation on Common Core State Standards. Being a part of this opportunity was again rewarding, fulfilling and overwhelming powerful. I had never experienced a sense of togetherness like I felt by attending a conference that was directly focused on increasing awareness and knowledge for minorities specifically as it related to PTA. Being a part of the diverse and inclusive experience was memorable beyond measure. I still recall names of attendees that touched me in a major way. I still have pictures and communicate with people that I now call friends as a result of my EMLC experience.

The EMLCs I have attended have impacted my leadership path by instilling more drive in me to continuously be an active advocate and volunteer in PTA, no matter where I reside. That is why when I moved approximately 3000 miles to Washington State from Kentucky, I knew that being involved and committed to Washington State PTAs was important to me. The EMLC helped support my mission to be a representative to underrepresented groups in an organization that has not always appeared to be representative of the communities in which they serve.

I would encourage minority leaders to attend an EMLC so that they can network and learn about topics that are specific to their needs. EMLC helps to build bridges, make connections and provide resources that are much-needed in the world of PTA to minority volunteers of underrepresented groups. Take the challenge to step out and network with minority volunteers who have a vision to empower and encourage others to be the best they can be for all children despite the obstacles they face.

Thank you,

Aneeka Ferrell, MBA/PA, BA
Nelson PTSA Family and Community Engagement Chair
My name is Tammie Jenkins. I reside in Atlanta, GA. My current position with PTA is Georgia PTA diversity & inclusion chair, local Reflections chair and parent. I have been a PTA volunteer for 12 years.

I first attended an Emerging Minority Leaders Conference at Georgia PTA’s Convention Leadership Training in July 2014. Attending the EMLC and learning that National PTA was taking action in word and deed to ignite leadership in parents from all races was very encouraging. Due to the information provided at EMLC, I continued to serve at my local school and submitted an application to serve on the district level. My application was accepted and resulted in me attending my first district conference and participating in the elections and meeting more emerging leaders.

After serving on the district level and being more involved, I met the Georgia PTA President at the time, Rita Erves, and told her about my goal to become more involved with making a positive difference in Georgia. When the Georgia PTA Diversity & Inclusion Chair position opened mid-year, I received a call and email asking if I would be interested in putting in an application to serve. I accepted the invitation and submitted my application. I was invited to the State Board Meeting and was nominated/voted for the Diversity & Inclusion Chair position. I gladly serve and am very thankful for the opportunity. Attending the EMLC workshop and receiving information about EMLC was very informative and has led me to apply for leadership opportunities to serve PTA.

Thank you,

Tammie Jenkins
Georgia PTA Diversity & Inclusion Chair
My name is Anna King. My current position with PTA is board member of National PTA. The first Emerging Minority Leaders Conference I attended was on October 31, 2008 in Oak Brook, IL. That conference set me on a course to play an intricate role in PTA in my school, my community and my state.

My husband and I joined our children’s elementary school PTA to support and be involved in the classrooms. It was 11 years before I became president of the Frederick A. Douglass Mid-High School PTSA in Oklahoma City, OK, and had my eyes opened to a whole different world of PTA. That is when we noticed the deterioration of parental involvement. Talking to parents, community leaders, alumni and anyone who would listen became a driving force of our PTSA.

When I delivered the membership dues to the state office, I saw all of the photos of past state presidents, dating back to 1922 and one picture really resonated with me. It was a photo of Liz Parker, the first African-American president of Oklahoma PTA.

Over the next year, I learned all I could about PTA. I became a council president and attended my first National PTA convention, where I was blessed to hear Dr. Maya Angelou share a narrative of her childhood, educational upbringing and the impact of PTA. Her powerful words caressed my soul and re-energized my passion for PTA. Being one of just four minority members of the state board, I came home determined to engage parents and the communities around us.

At that first EMLC, there were many wonderful workshops, engaging group experiences and lots of collaboration from like-minded, minority leaders from across the country. It was an amazing experience to share and work with other leaders facing the same obstacles I was at home. The spectrum of information displayed and the sincerity of all who shared their ideas about diversity and inclusiveness was an incredibly moving and humbling experience.

I came home feeling extremely empowered and rejuvenated about what could happen with PTA. There was a new focus and determination. The inspiration, training, mentors and many friendships I received at EMLC eventually gave me the courage to become the state president of Oklahoma PTA. Some of these friendships included Sherry Reimer, OKPTA executive director, who always pushed me to learn about the history of PTA; Terri Silver, a former state PTA president who always reminded me to think of the bigger picture; Charmaine Brown and Dennescia Robinson, dear friends who always had encouraging words; and my family—the reason I do everything in life.

Finally, I was honored to have my friend and mentor, Liz Parker, install me as state president in 2011. On that day she handed me a rose and said, “Being able to interact with a diverse population is simply a microcosm of our daily roles. It allows us to have a continuous reminder of our purpose and keeps us on our toes for the children and families we serve. I have never forgotten those words, from the lady whose picture captured my heart in 2007.

Thank you,

Anna King

National PTA Board Member
Former Oklahoma PTA President
My name is Lisa Mack. I reside in South Euclid, Ohio. My current position with PTA is immediate past president of Ohio PTA and I am also a member of the National PTA Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Committee. I have been a PTA volunteer for 21 years.

I first attended an Emerging Minority Leaders Conference held in Detroit, MI, in October 2006. I have found Emerging Minority Leaders Conferences to be some of the most empowering PTA conferences that I have ever attended. I was amazed at the vast diversity of the attendees. Not only were we ethnically diverse, we had a rainbow of geographic, cultural and leadership experiences.

The activity that was most impactful to me was the Walk Through PTA History. It gave me a true understanding of the powerful work that PTA has done through the years, and affirmed that I was part of an organization that had a rich history of child advocacy and victories.

The workshops were very enriching as well. My fellow Ohio attendee and I actually took back concepts from a couple of the workshops and created a workshop entitled, “Collaborative and Ethical Leadership.” We presented it at our state convention. This workshop has now been added to the Ohio PTA Third Step Gold Key Leadership Award requirements.

It was also encouraging to hear panels with established PTA leaders who have continued to serve as examples and mentors through the years.

After that first EMLC, I returned to Ohio with a greater appreciation for PTA and its successes, but also felt empowered and totally excited to share what I had learned.

Ohio PTA created its own Walk Through PTA History, which the state PTA, as well as various councils have used for events. We have also hosted our own EMLC, later changing its name to the Diversity and Inclusion Conference. We now incorporate diversity and inclusion training into tracks at our conferences.

Thank you,

Lisa Mack
Member, National PTA Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Committee
Former Ohio PTA President
My name is Susan Myhre. My current position with PTA is urban family engagement network team lead with Nevada PTA.

When I was first approached about attending EMLC, I was skeptical. Being new to PTA, and only having some predetermined notions about the organization, I was incredulous about any such leadership training. After all, I knew a little something about leadership from my previous experiences at school, in the military and at church—or so I thought. What could I possibly learn from a PTA leadership workshop? I was curious so I attended the training. Wow! I was surprised and more than a little impressed by everything I learned. I quickly realized the impact on our little community that PTA was making and would continue to make, based on the organization's track record, informational resources and advocacy programs. It was in these leadership workshops that I learned about PTA's mission, about deliberative assemblies and about how a passion for helping children could bring people together.

At my first Emerging Minority Leader Conference, I was introduced to the concept of collaborative leadership. A leadership style in which very different individuals, with varied skills and personality types, all come together in mutual respect to share information and responsibility for the accomplishment of a common goal. What?! No boss? No one in charge? No higher authority casting vision and dictating actions? This was NOT what I had learned about leadership in my previous life experiences. This was something much, much better! Here was a new way to bring people together to achieve a desired outcome. With no superiors or no subordinates, collaborative leadership brings “equals” to the table, where everyone has a voice, ideas are discussed and consensus can be achieved.

The collaborative leadership model worked wonders for our local PTA and scaled up incredibly well when we applied it across the larger community working with other child advocate organizations throughout the city. People enjoy working with other like-minded individuals who are as passionate as they are about the mission. The collaborative leadership model helped us attract and engage with these passionate people and allowed us to accomplish goals that we could not have done as a single organization. Collaborative leadership turns out to be an amazing tool for bringing all kinds of people together for the accomplishment of any goal, and it's thanks to EMLC that I was able to learn about it.

Thank you,

Susan Myhre
Nevada PTA Urban Family Engagement Network Team Lead
My name is Matthew John Rodriguez. I reside in Schaumburg, Ill. My current position with PTA is state president and I have been a PTA volunteer for 16 years. I first attended an Emerging Minority Leaders Conference held in Oak Brook, IL, in 2008.

I attended my first Emerging Minority Leaders Conference during my first year on the Illinois state board as a director of juvenile protection and safety. The EMLC was amazing. I met all kinds of new people and we are still close friends today. I was able to build a network so we could work things out together.

Without this opportunity and the trust and faith those in leadership positions at the EMLC gave me, I believe I would not have advanced in PTA leadership positions past the local level. I am now Illinois’ first Hispanic male state president and I would NEVER had imagined myself in such a leadership role. It’s such a rewarding experience, and I have EMLC to thank for it.

Thank you,

Matthew Rodriguez
Illinois PTA President