A PTA leader has to embrace and overcome challenges daily in their role. They fearlessly advocate for their students in their school and community.

2020 has been extremely challenging! With many schools on a hybrid or fully remote model, leading your PTA may seem impossible. All the activities that are trademarks of your PTA are cancelled or riddled with so many challenges that you may just want to throw in the towel.

PTA Leaders are made of sterner stuff! You don’t run from a challenge: otherwise, you would not be in your current PTA position. Look inside for some great ideas and inspiration! No one backs PTA leaders into a corner!
COMMUNITY

PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR A COMMUNITY THAT CARES ABOUT THEM.

What we have learned from this time in quarantine is that we are made for community. Being isolated from one another is not good for our physical or mental health. People need to feel like they belong!

PTA/PTSA/SEPTAs are in the unique position to give their families a sense of belonging. Even if your school is fully remote, there are still ways to connect.

One of the simplest ways is a phone call. Calls can be divided up between volunteers so the task is not overwhelming. The biggest part of this is listening! You don't have to have all the answers. It’s okay to say I’m not able to answer that question but let me find someone who can.

This is a great task for high school students who need community service hours. Give them a script and a spreadsheet to log the information they receive.

Prepare a list of resources ahead of time so you are prepared. These can include contact information for:

- Free Breakfast/Lunch Program at school
- Key school officials like the Principal, Social Worker, Psychologist, etc.
- Local Food Pantry
- Local Mental Health Agencies

This might seem overwhelming and that’s okay. Adapt the idea to what works in your community. Some PTAs might send out a handwritten note to their families. Some PTAs might make preprinted postcards that say PTA is thinking about you! You can list links to your website’s resource page and a way to contact you. The way you do it isn’t as important as just reaching out!

Phone script

HELLO, MY NAME IS MELISSA CANCRO AND I’M WITH BROOKSIDE PTA. WE ARE CHECKING IN WITH ALL OUR FAMILIES TO SEE HOW THEY ARE DOING IN THIS CHALLENGING TIME.

1) HOW ARE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY DOING?
2) IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WE CAN HELP YOU WITH?

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME AT BROOKSIDEPTA@GMAIL.COM WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS.
IDEA BANK

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY?

- Be a source of reliable information! PTA can provide parents and families with accurate information on what is going in their community. Be the voice of calm and reason. If there is a question go straight to the source and find the answer.
- Offer valuable and timely programming. With many online conferencing options like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, a meeting on a hot topic can be widely attended.
  - Parents and families are worried about their child’s mental wellbeing. Schedule a meeting on Mental Health. Invite the school psychologist, a local physician and someone from a Mental Health agency to come and speak.
  - Survey parents and families and find out what they are struggling with. If it’s 5th Grade Math, ask your school if they could provide someone to talk about how to help your child in Math. It will benefit the parents, families, and the school to work together.
- Start a Resource Page on your PTA website. There are many organizations offering free resources, such as museum and zoo tours. There are virtual classes for just about everything! Having resources in one place will help parents and families search for what they need at their own pace.
- Partner with a local food pantry. Encourage families to donate or volunteer.
- Partner with the local arts councils, theaters and music programs to provide students with opportunities in the arts.
  - Don’t forget National PTA’s Reflection’s program! Encourage students to work on their artwork at home.
- Partner with your local library to encourage literacy.
  - Outdoor library - One library built a box where people could take and leave books.
  - Run a NYS PTA PARP (Pick a Reading Partner) Program! It can be run virtually.
- School supply give away - This is usually done at the beginning of the school year but supplies run low towards the holidays.
IDEA BANK

SEASONAL IDEAS

- Story walk - Pick a favorite picture book. Print over sized pages, laminate and mount on sturdy material along a trail so kids can read the pages as they walk!
- Parade - Everyone loves a parade! Decorate your cars for the holidays. Arrange a route with the local police with stops to safely hand out treats.
- Play Minute to Win It games like how many pieces of candy corn can you get in the bowl with chopsticks in a minute. Check out Pinterest for some great ideas!
- Host some Jackbox Games or Among Us games for High School students and use the Discord app to chat.
- Issue a Tik Tok PTA challenge.
- Nail It Challenge. Find a cake design and challenge families to recreate it. They send in a photo of their creation. Invite some teachers and administrators to judge and declare the winner with a fun prize.
- Host trivia night on Zoom. Send the winners a prize through email or the mail.
- Chalk the walk. Encourage students to write positive messages on their driveways or even the school entrance.

PTA IS FOR EVERYONE

MAKE SURE TO BE INCLUSIVE

- Be sure to send any PTA communications in the languages spoken by the families in your school district. Ask your school administration office for this information. If you need something translated, please email the office (translation@nyspta.org).
- Be welcoming at events. It’s easy to stand and talk with your friends. Look for the people on the fringes and welcome them into the group.
- Make sure events are accessible to all students. If you are hosting a Reflections program, provide art supplies so that all students can participate.
At the NYS PTA Conference, Interim Commissioner Betty A. Rosa and Vice Chancellor T. Andrew Brown announced the launch of the Parent Dashboard on the New York State Education Department (NYSED) website.

The Parent Dashboard is part of the New York State’s plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The goal is to increase transparency and give parents access to essential information about the schools their children attend. The following school-level data elementary are included: Student Enrollment and Ethnicity, Average Class Size, School Climate, Accountability Status, Assessment Results, Financial Transparency, Graduation Rates, College, Career and Civic Readiness, School/District Location and Contact Information.

The helpful Question and Answer section answers frequently asked questions about the above data points.

The dashboard also connects parents of English Language Learners (ELL) to the ELL Parent Hotline Phone Number (800) 469-8224 or via email. There is also a link where the hotline information is translated into 27 different languages. There is information on Special Needs, Mental Health, School Safety, Diploma types and much more.

NYSED is looking for your help to make this Dashboard an effective tool! Parents and families can participate in an online feedback survey available in 17 different languages. They will use this feedback to identify the data that is most useful to the parents and the public and make improvements to the website.
WRAP UP

WE CAN’T WAIT TO HEAR ALL THE AMAZING IDEAS YOU COME UP WITH!

Our advice in all of this is try something a little out of your comfort zone. As long as you are doing it safely within the State Guidelines and keep the kids safe, it will be worth it to show that your PTA is reaching out. We are more than what society thinks PTA is!

Don’t forget to Advocate for all your students. This is all new to all of us. All the schools have worked hard on their reopening plans. What looks good on paper as a plan might not work out in real life. PTA can use their voice to troubleshoot situations.

For example, some schools have been giving out the free and reduced lunches 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. during the week. If you are a working parent or caregiver, you might be not able to take off during the day to pick up these meals. Some parents and families might not have a vehicle to get to the school. PTA can raise awareness with the school decision makers. They can help find solutions so everyone can have access. For example, PTA leaders could ask the school district to provide evening hours for pickup or deliver the food to an accessible location for parents without transportation access.

Don’t just advocate at the school district level! Join NYS PTA in advocacy efforts in Albany! Please sign up for our Take Action campaigns. This way you can be knowledgeable on the issues and add your voice!

Advocacy can seem scary but it’s really your story about how policies are affecting your child and the children in your community. Your story matters! Remember your why! Your why starts with your child and it grows because you care about their friends and your community. After that, it’s not hard to care about kids all over the state and the country!

Remember you are part of a community too - a community of PTA Leaders! Your Region board and NYS PTA board are here to help you! You can find their contact information on the NYS PTA website.

We are PTA Strong!
We are stronger together!
You've got this!!