



NEW YORK

PARENT TEACHER

BACK TO
SCHOOL
2025

A PUBLICATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION



Everyone Belongs in PTA!

By Patricia Frazier, NYS PTA President

It is the time of year when we focus on membership as a way of Measuring Our Mission for Every Child. Across the state, unit membership drives are off to a tremendous start! Membership not only strengthens our voice locally but in Albany and Washington, D.C. also. Coming up in November is our statewide membership drive centered on celebrating student members.

PTA membership builds a culture of belonging in our units. And it is that belonging that leads to amplified advocacy and impactful family engagement, the best ways to achieve our mission!

Belonging denotes being an integral and accepted member of a group. Each group member is a respected and valued member of a shared community. Most importantly, a sense of belonging ties diversity, equity and inclusion together.

Extend “belonging” to region, state or national PTA events. Representatives from your unit should attend the trainings, dinners, conferences, and conventions at every level. Many of the first-time attendees at our recent Summer Leadership Conference reported networking as a highlight and definitely wanted more!

Be confident in knowing that membership in PTA supports the overall mission to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. Seek out NYS PTA

and National PTA resources to assist you in expanding your membership. Fostering a sense of belonging can then encourage members to fulfill their potential as future PTA leaders!

We appreciate and celebrate each unit’s efforts to reach their membership goal that in turn helps NYS PTA to reach our goal of 225,000 members.

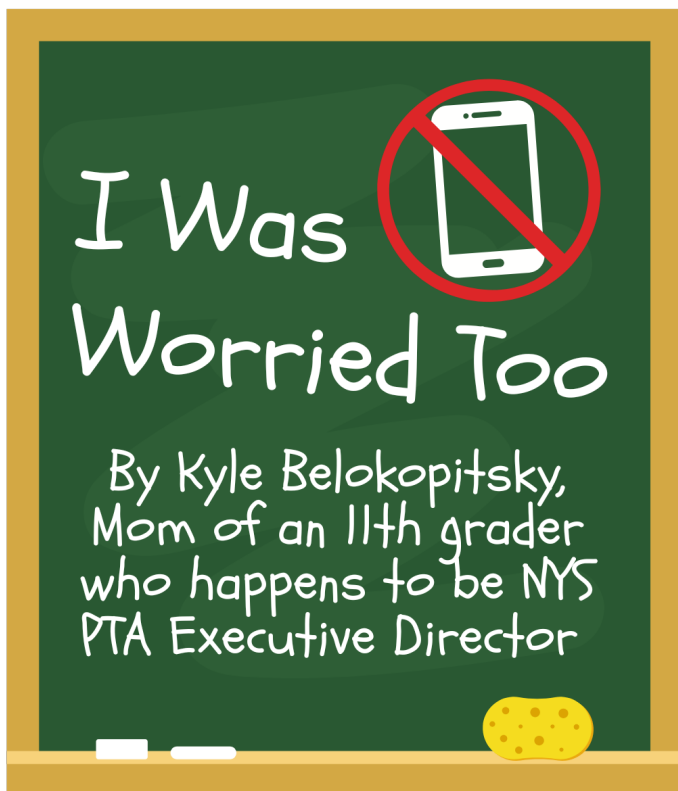
And together we will proudly contribute our membership numbers to join with the millions of members across the country to give National PTA the loudest voice possible!

Membership badges for 25-26



are already being awarded to mark the accomplishments of our units and more are on the way! We look forward to seeing how they are “displayed” on social media, bulletin boards and maybe even on a sash or two.





It was mid-August, and my soon to be 11th grader opened an email from his principal and read his school's new cell phone policy. He turned, looked at me, and said (with much sass), "Did you do this?"

I had to be honest, as he stared me down, and say "Yes, we worked with many other great education associations, the Governor and the Legislature in revising the drafts, to make it work for districts, parents, and kids. We all tried our best, and I think it's going to be ok."

He definitely said to me, "Well then YOU need to stop texting me during the day. You text me all the time during school. You are going to have to stop too." I paused, looked at him, and realized he was 100% right – I DID text him all the time during the day. For things that could ABSOLUTELY wait until 2:30pm. Then he walked away. He was done with me at that moment, but I knew in my heart of hearts it was going to be ok, he was going to be ok, and that our kids would be better off.

and health and wellness and happiness and success, and every inch of you needs to make sure they are ok. I was worried too. I get it.

But I knew that cell phones were a distraction, heck, my kid just told me I was a distraction with my texts to him (reality check moment). The notifications, and snaps, and instagram posts, and apps, and texts. I knew that if we worked together, parents, families, educators, teachers, we could give our kids back time, and connection, and learning, and some of the childhood we had. And I knew his great teachers, educators and staff would do everything possible to support him and keep him safe.

My cousin Chelsea is a veteran high school English

teacher, and a NYS Teacher of the Year Finalist. She posted this: "This cell phone ban is the greatest educational decision that has been made in years. I'm floored that this was all we needed to do all this time."

Another local teacher posted on my community message board: "I currently work at XXX high school, and now with the cell phone ban, I was looking to see if any community members have any board games, puzzles, playing cards, etc. that they may want to part with. The students are asking for things to do with their friends during lunch and/or study halls. This is an awesome way for them to interact and get a break from classes. If anyone would be willing to donate, please pm me!" (Kyle note, how cool is this right?)

I talked to a lot of teachers and educators these past weeks. They have told me the same thing. It's going ok. The kids don't seem to be bothered too much by the change. My school already had a policy in place and we just had to tweak it. The kids are playing cards. They are talking in the lunch room. They are playing dominoes and dice. They are connecting in

I talked to a lot of teachers and educators these past weeks. They have told me the same thing. It's going ok. The kids don't seem to be bothered too much by the change. My school already had a policy in place and we just had to tweak it. The kids are playing cards. They are talking in the lunch room. They are playing dominoes and dice. They are connecting in



ways they haven't seen in years.

I talked to education lawyers. Being a lawyer and advocate myself, I wanted to make sure our students who needed their cell phone had access. They told me so far, so good. Every one of their appropriate requests have been granted. Kids who need their cell phones have access. I'm sure we will have challenges there, but we will make sure that support continues – I promise.

I talked to school leaders. They said after the first week, it's been reasonably smooth. For the districts who use pouches, kids are learning how to lock and unlock them (and I have chuckled at some of the how to videos!). For the districts who are using lockers, or backpacks, or other storage solutions, it's going ok. Little bumps, nothing major they say.

I talked to a lot of parents and families. Our members across the state. In the beginning it was a change. Trust me, I know. I had to stop texting Jackson ridiculous things I didn't need to text him. Did you remember your soccer cleats? Do you have your uniform? Did you remember your snack for before practice? What time do you need to get picked up after practice? I mean, come on - if he forgot his cleats, or his uniform, or a practice snack, he could go to the office and call me. He can use his phone after school, so he could tell me then what time he needed to get picked up after practice. Reality check for mom.

I was worried too. And I get it. But so far? I think it's going ok. I'd love to hear from you, so email me at execdirector@nyspta.org about how it's going for you and your children if you'd like. For Jackson and I? I stopped texting him during the day, well, mostly. It was hard doing that, and to be honest, sometimes I forget and still

text. But I try my best and I know I'll get better with time. He does text around 2:30pm if he forgot something for soccer, but it's been rare. He's called once from the front office for money for a school

t-shirt. Of course, I stopped on my way to work and dropped off the money. And I'm trying to worry less. I'm a work in progress, but it's going ok.

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Start planning for Spring! Your PTA can help the children in your community travel more safely to and from school by hosting a Traffic Safety event! NYS PTA can provide educational materials, reflective give-aways, bicycle helmets, and more for your event.

Email Kim Blasiak, NYS PTA Programs / Events Associate for more information about the event at kblasiak@nyspta.org.

The Every Child Travels Safely initiative will focus on transportation safety and see that children and caregivers increase safety in all aspects of child travel. To learn more about Traffic Safety, [Click Here!](#)





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DID YOU KNOW?

A Check List for PTA Leaders

By Susan Brown, Field Support Coordinator

1. What makes a unit in good standing? 25 paid members, officers updated annually, insurance paid, Bylaws updated at least every 3 years, 990 filed, and both the president and treasurer have attended annual financial accountability course.
2. Did you know that “procedures” are an important part of how your unit functions?

Bylaws and procedures are different in the following ways:

Bylaws	Procedures
Internal governing documents, force of law	Specific instruction on how to carry out day-to-day work
Fundamental rules	More details and frequently changed; guidelines
Updated every 3 years	Updated as needed
Bylaws available from your RD; have them at every meeting	NYS Resource Guide, section 7 gives sample procedures; kept at the local level
When to hold elections and quorum	How to hold elections- how to pick tellers, when do people need to have a membership by in order to vote
Who is on nominations committee	How to pick the nomination committee- letter of intent or verbal? Self- nominate?
Standing committee chair is on the exec board	What is the plan of work of the committees; timelines; contact lists
Approved by the membership with 2/3 vote with 30 days notice	Approved by a 2/3 exec board vote or majority of general membership at any time. Changed at any exec board meeting

3. You need a quorum to vote. A quorum is spelled out in your bylaws and is typically 10 members (or a majority of the Executive Committee for Exec. Committee meetings). These people must all be paid members of the unit.
4. You MUST let your membership know when you are having general meetings.
5. All elected officers’ positions have a maximum of two years. Shuffling officers is not a sign of a healthy unit.
6. Your PTA’s nominating committee is elected (according to the procedures outlined in your bylaws) and never appointed.
7. The president can never serve on the nominating and audit committees.
8. You must be elected in order to serve as an officer.

9. PTA credit cards are highly risky activities and leave your unit open to monetary loss. No Venmo or Zelle. Use Stripe or PayPal only for taking money in.
10. Reconciliations of the bank account and checkbook should be signed off on by a non- authorized signer every month. Treasurer reports are needed at each meeting.
11. Your audit should be done at least annually and any time treasurers change. You need at least 3 people to perform your audit, and it cannot be the President, the Treasurer or any bank signer.
12. The Executive Committee is elected members, whereas the Executive Board includes appointed standing committee chairs. Your Bylaws will specify the members of each Executive Team.
13. When you join a PTA, you immediately become a member of both NYS PTA and National PTA as well as your local PTA unit.
14. Your 2024-2025 membership expired on September 30, as an elected officer, you shall be a member for

2025-2026 by the date you assume office.

15. Your unit must file a 990 Annual Report with the IRS every year. PTA provides a free service through File990.org for ALL NYS PTA units. File 990 is a free, fast, and easy way to e-file your 990-N form or 990-EZ form.
16. 990s are due by November 15. If you fail to file you can lose your nonprofit status.
17. If you have questions on how to run your unit, navigating bylaws, elections or other questions, who do you ask? Your Region Director (RD)
18. Money should go to the many not a few. You cannot give money to a family, but you can to a grade level.
19. All members are entitled to see minutes and treasurer reports.
20. PTA is an advocacy group. Where We Stand lists our positions on the state website.



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Are you looking for a special way to honor your most dedicated volunteers? Present them with the [Honorary Life Member Award](#) at your next event!

The purpose of this award is to recognize individuals for their contributions to the welfare of children and youth. The financial contribution supports the Twin Projects.

Already awarded a volunteer with the Honorary Life Member Award and want to highlight them even more? Present them [the Golden Oak Plaque or the Diamond Award!](#)

New York State PTA is proud to share the Golden Oak Award plaque and the Diamond Award table-top sculpture. Each award is beautifully crafted, to make a distinguished presentation to an honoree. Both feature personalized engraving with the name of the award recipient, and bear the signature of our state president.

Proceeds from the Golden Oak and Diamond Awards will be dedicated to leadership development throughout the state. Make a positive contribution to the future of PTA, while at the same time honoring the dedication and excellence of members past and present!

Bite-Sized: Insights from NYS PTA — Your New Go-To Podcast for Parents and Leaders

Available on:



 **bite sized**
INSIGHTS

*By Mary Sotomayor, Leadership
Development Coordinator*

New Episodes Every Month!

Back-to-school season is here — new teachers, new routines, new challenges. But here's something fresh you can actually look forward to: NYS PTA's brand-new podcast, Bite-Sized: Insights from NYS PTA. Think of it as your on-the-go toolkit for navigating the world of parenting, school involvement, and leadership — one quick, practical episode at a time.

Each episode is designed with busy parents and leaders in mind. Whether you're in the carpool line, meal-prepping for the week, or waiting in the bleachers at practice, you'll have easy access to real conversations that matter.

Here's what you can expect:

- Expert tips on parenting, leadership, and school-community partnerships.
- Candid conversations with PTA leaders across the state.
- Real-life stories from parents just like you — the wins, the lessons, and the “wish I knew that sooner” moments.
- Actionable takeaways you can start using in your own school community.

Why tune in? Because we know

you're juggling a hundred things, and you need more than inspiration — you need practical solutions and a sense of connection. This podcast delivers both.

You'll:

- Hear from leaders in education and advocacy who have been exactly where you are.
- Get ideas you can take straight to your PTA meetings or family dinner table.
- Feel plugged into a statewide network of parents and educators working toward the same mission: every child.

Parents have already called it “the perfect mix of conversation and action”, and we think you'll

agree.

Ready to give it a listen?

- Subscribe now on Spotify, YouTube, Amazon Music or Apple Podcasts.
- Share an episode with your PTA, school staff, or a fellow parent — spark a conversation that matters.
- Have a topic you'd love to hear covered? Email us at podcast@nyspta.org — this podcast is built for you, and we want your voice in the mix.

As we like to say: grab your coffee, pop in your earbuds, and join the conversation. Because when parents, schools, and communities talk — and listen — incredible things happen.

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Breaking Down Barriers: Making Every Family Feel Welcome

By Velida (Val) Ford, NYS PTA Family Engagement Coordinator



When families genuinely feel embraced by a school community, amazing things happen. Every student benefits—they thrive academically, feel more confident, and know that the adults in their lives are working together for their success. Teachers feel supported, and PTAs grow stronger.

Yet, for many families, stepping into a PTA meeting or school event can feel intimidating. Work schedules, language differences, and even past experiences can lead families to feel out of place.

As Family Engagement Coordinator, I believe every child benefits when all families see themselves reflected, respected, and included in our schools. Here are some actionable steps units can implement to dismantle barriers and open doors for every family:

1. Start with a Genuine Welcome

The first five minutes of any PTA meeting or school event sets the tone. Consider greeting families personally, offering name tags, and having a “buddy” system so no one feels left alone. A small gesture—like a smile or a handshake—can make a big difference in making families (and therefore students) feel they belong.



2. Offer Flexible Participation

Not every family is able to participate in evening meetings or weekend events. Consider these strategies to enhance inclusivity:

- Rotate meeting times
- Record brief updates for later sharing
- Provide a hybrid option
- Send a simple recap email or WhatsApp message

These small adjustments help families stay connected and, in turn, keep students supported.

3. The Importance of Language Access

Language access is essential to family engagement. If you have families who speak multiple languages, consider offering translated flyers or using translation apps at meetings. Even better, invite bilingual parents to act as “language champions” to help bridge communication gaps.

Did you know? NYS PTA provides translation services! If you need a document or flyer translated, send an email to translation@nyspta.org and specify the language you require.

4. Celebrate Family Strengths

Every family brings something unique—skills, culture, experiences, and traditions. Encourage families to showcase these strengths by sharing a recipe in the newsletter, telling a cultural story at a school assembly, or lending a hand during an event. When families feel their contributions are appreciated, they are more likely to remain

engaged—and their children see their identities honored.

5. Ask, Don't Assume

Instead of making assumptions about what families need, ask them directly. A simple survey, a quick question during dismissal, or a personal conversation can reveal valuable insights for engagement. Often, the most effective strategies originate from the families we aim to connect with.

Why It Matters

Research indicates that family engagement is one of the strongest predictors of student success—regardless of income, background, or zip code. When families feel connected, students have better attendance, higher achievement, and a stronger sense of belonging. By fostering welcoming environments, we provide every child with an opportunity to thrive.

Try This in Your School

- Pair new families with “welcome buddies” from your PTA.
- Translate your next flyer into two or three of the most commonly spoken languages at home.
- Conclude each meeting by asking: “Who’s missing—and how can we connect with them next time?”

Family engagement is not about one big event; it's about many small, consistent steps that build trust and belonging. Together, we can ensure that every family feels valued, and that every student has the support they need to succeed.



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From Sign-Ups to Showing Up: Building Engagement in Your PTA

By Danielle Blanchard-St. Louime, Membership Engagement Specialist

When a woman on the playground at my son's elementary school learned I was a stay-at-home mom of three boys who wanted to spend what very little free time I had volunteering, we exchanged numbers and she remarked, "You're going to regret telling me that!" I later discovered she was president of the PTA, so it came as no surprise when I received a text asking if I would consider becoming a class parent. I thought this was the perfect opportunity to be present for my children in a way I had only been able to dream of for years while I worked full time and battled extreme guilt because of it. In my mind, I could do this. The PTA/class parent role was mostly about bake sales and book fairs. I was so wrong.

At its core, PTA aims to advocate for every child and help them achieve their fullest potential. While fundraising often plays a huge role in helping facilitate that, I've found that sometimes another, perhaps quieter, factor in the success of a unit is the strength of its relationships. To me, a PTA is strongest when it functions inside a community that not only cares about its students but actively

works to improve their lives in every way. By creating an inclusive environment that welcomes others and their ideas, PTAs can empower families to become and stay involved. Here are a few ways for leaders to boost engagement while building community this back-to-school season.

1. Host an informal gathering on school grounds or at a nearby park. While Know Your School Nights and Open Houses are great opportunities to introduce your PTA and the benefits of membership, they can often be hectic and filled with lots of information regarding school policies and classroom procedures. A laid-back atmosphere with light refreshments can be the perfect backdrop for students

and their families to socialize while building new bonds and strengthening old ones. "Popsicles with the PTA" would be a great themed event for one of those warm September days before fall weather fully takes over!

2. Share a "One Word Story" icebreaker at your first PTA meeting. PTA is all about partnership, and the first step in being able to work together is listening. After the formal business of your first meeting has been handled, invite attendees to tell a collaborative story with each person saying one word per turn. This requires active engagement and participation and can be a fun way for people to express their

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creativity while learning about each other.

3. **Encourage new families to join PTA with a buddy system.** Whether they're nervous about their kindergartener adjusting to the educational setting or just settling into the neighborhood after moving 2,500 miles away, newcomers may have difficulty finding their place in an unfamiliar school. PTAs can help ease the transition by pairing new members with experienced families, which could lead to carpools, playdates, and even lifelong friendships. On a personal note, I have had the honor of being mentored by some of the most phenomenal human beings I've ever met through the PTA, in particular several women who have helped me become a better mother, wife and person. What started out as connections based on a shared passion for our

children's education and well-being have turned into deeply fulfilling friendships that help me feel supported and loved.

4. **Make sure all your marketing materials, events and communications are inclusive and reflect the makeup of your community.** PTAs need diverse members and leaders with various perspectives, ideas and backgrounds to truly thrive. Consider the demographics of your area and have flyers and emails available in other languages if necessary to ensure you're reaching as many families as possible. This way, you can elevate your approach to family engagement to see whose voices may be missing in critical decision-making processes. Remember: members equal voices and voices equal change.

Engaging members and families in PTA doesn't have to involve

a Six Sigma-level process of strategizing – all it takes is a shared willingness to work together for the betterment of children. It can start with a simple conversation in the grocery store or while waiting for your slot at Parent-Teacher Conference night. In the three years since that mom approached me at morning drop-off, with her warm spirit and a well-practiced elevator pitch, I have served as a class parent, Vice President of Membership and Vice President of Events for my elementary school unit; Vice President of Legislation for the high school PTSA; and am in my second year on the NYS PTA Governance Team. I have never regretted telling Mrs. Cameron that I would love to volunteer for the PTA. OK, maybe that one time when the cash registers didn't work at the book fair...but that's another story for another day. This back-to-school season, engage, encourage, empower, and ENJOY your PTA!



SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE

National PTA School of Excellence Program

National PTA School of Excellence recognition program opens the lines of communication and critical thinking within school communities to make data-driven decisions that yield positive, long-term results. School of Excellence is committed to supporting and recognizing partnerships between local PTAs and schools to enrich the educational experience and overall well-being for all students. Enrollment for the 2025-2026 program is open until October 15. Review this sample [Enrollment Form \(en español\)](#) to see what information is required. [Click Here to Enroll Today!](#)



NYS PTA became the FIRST in the NATION to charter a statewide LGBTQ+ PTA unit.

Click Here to Become a member TODAY!



No Cell Phones? Now What?

By Amy Hysick, Resolutions Coordinator

New York State just put a “bell-to-bell” ban on cell phones in schools, and it’s a big change. The idea is to help kids focus more and create a better learning environment. I know it’s a huge adjustment for students and families, but this new rule actually has some big pluses—it could boost how well kids do in school, help them grow socially and emotionally, and just make them feel better overall.

The Upside: Why This Ban Is a Good Thing

- **Better Focus and Learning:** Imagine trying to learn with a constant stream of notifications, social media, and games. It’s impossible. Without those distractions, kids can really dive into their schoolwork. They can take in more information and, in the end, get better grades.
- **Real-Life Social Connections:** I’ve already noticed a difference in the hallways at my high school. Where we used to have to dodge kids glued to their screens, the halls are now buzzing with laughter and conversation. The ban is pushing kids to talk to each

other face-to-face during lunch and breaks. This is huge for building friendships and learning those essential communication skills you just can’t get from a screen.

- **Less Cyberbullying and Digital Drama:** So much of the stress and bullying that happens online starts during the school day. By taking phones out of the picture, we can make school a safer place. It cuts down on the chances for online harassment and all the emotional weight that comes with it.
- **Better Sleep and Mental Health:** Spending less time on screens during the day can actually lead to better sleep. Plus, it can help lower the anxiety and stress that come from being constantly connected. This is a great step toward supporting kids’ mental well-being both at school and at home.

How to Help Your Child with the Change

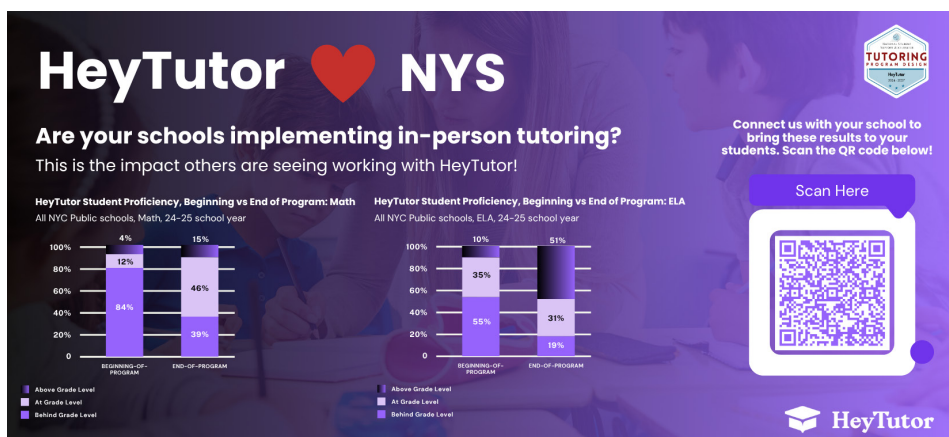
For a lot of kids, being without their phone all day is a real challenge—they’ve gotten used to having it with them all the time. As



parents, we can play a huge role in helping them through this.

- **Talk About It:** The best thing you can do is talk to your kids about the ban. Listen to their concerns and let them know you hear them. Explain the positive reasons behind the policy, focusing on what they’ll gain—like better focus and less stress—instead of what they’re losing.
- **Model Good Habits:** Our kids watch what we do. Be aware of your own screen time and how often you’re on your phone. Try to set some device-free times at home, like during meals or right before bed. A great tip is to encourage them to charge their phones somewhere other than their bedroom so they aren’t tempted by notifications that can interrupt their sleep.

The first few days of this change haven’t been easy for everyone, but seeing the way students are now interacting and connecting with each other makes me really excited and hopeful for the rest of the school year.



Executive Function Toolkit: Getting Things Done and Scheduling



By Susan Brown, Field Support Coordinator

Executive functioning (EF) is the ability to plan and manage one's life. It includes things like time management, task initiation, problem solving, verbal reasoning, persistence, attention and emotional regulation. Many people with EF challenges struggle to get things done.

1. The "Non-Negotiable" Schedule Trick. Just like basketball practice or doctor appointments, study time goes directly into their calendar. Here's why this works: When study time is treated as important as other activities, it's no longer optional. No more "I'll do it later" excuses!
2. Time robbers. "The concept of "time robbers" can be a fun way to call to attention all the little (or maybe not so little) things we do that take away from our goal" (Van Zandt). Identify your time robbers and think up ways to prevent them. If you get up to get a drink repeatedly, have a bottle of water on standby. If you look out the window and get distracted, do not face the window. Silence notifications on your phone and set it out of reach.
3. Checklists are a marvelous tool for getting things done. They help surgeons perform their work successfully and pilots fly their planes. Make a list, you might have parts

of a job listed (clean your room might include- dishes to dishwasher, dirty clothes to hamper, clean clothes to dresser/closet, school supplies on desk, bed made) and cross things off as you go. For younger kids, pictures rather than words are used.

A checklist should be limited to five or fewer things. If you need more items, have additional checklists. Instead of telling kids what to do, ask questions, "What comes next?" or "Have you finished with ____?"

4. Establish routines. Bedtime might include pick up your toys, get backpack ready for school tomorrow, put electronic devices on charger, brush teeth, wash face, put on PJs, put dirty clothes in the hamper, read a story with an adult, go to bed. Coming home from school might be: have snack, go to the bathroom, do your homework, complete your chores. A

checklist or picture schedule could be used to help ensure each step gets done. Once the child is very successful with the routine, you can wean them from the routine list. If they get off track, ask, "What is the next step?" Having routines for daily/ weekly tasks saves mental energy and ensures things get done. Routines reduce the cognitive load of getting things done.

5. Body doubling and initiation. Your child needs to do homework. You sit and do your paperwork or read next to them doing their work, no phones allowed. The bedroom needs to be picked up. Go into the room with your child and let them pick up the papers and books and you put clothes in the closet. This models attention to task and the mirroring helps the brain focus on the task for longer.



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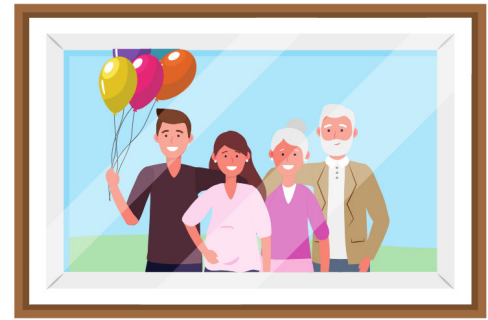
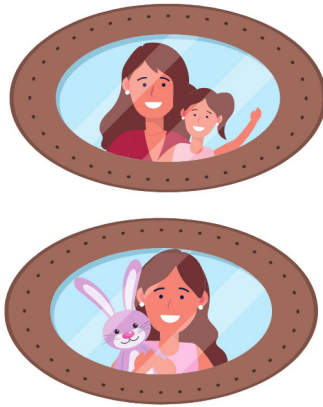
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Saying Hello, to Goodbye.



By Jennifer Collazo, NYS PTA Secretary

It's the night before the first day of the new school year, and

Well, in my home, my youngest daughter who is a senior had her backpack with charged Chromebook, binder, and a single notebook packed sitting by the door. She had picked out her outfit and messaged some friends. She was ready for the new school year. It will be our last.

As a PTA president, I have danced this dance before. The bulletin boards are updated, the welcome back/please renew your membership messages sent, and meeting rooms are booked. But this will be my last year too. We're both getting ready to say Hello, to Goodbye.

PTA is a great many things to many people. It is the premier child advocacy organization in the nation. One has only to look at our rich history of accomplishments to see the benefit of being a member. But its meaning is also personal. Units are welcome wagons to new families. Giving new parents, guardians, students, and their families the resources

that they need can have such a powerful impact on our students' educational journey. Units are also a source of support connecting families in need of services with those of similar circumstance. It is this sense of community that has been the backbone of our association for over 128 years.

It is all about the kids. We attend meetings to learn about actions, activities, and events that affect our kids. We volunteer to organize a special event or celebration for our kids. We joined a committee because we see the benefit of a program for our kids. Whether it was yesterday or twenty, thirty, fifty, or one hundred twenty-eight years ago, our focus has been our children. Just the way that we became involved in PTA, so will the parents, guardians, and families of the children starting their educational journeys. As our new members come on board, they bring newer ideas, different ideas. They bring new experiences, excitement, and energy to be involved. Together, our association grows.

Life in PTA doesn't just move fast, it moves lightning fast. We move from one activity and deadline to the next, until one day we realize that it is almost June? It was just yesterday when I was sitting at my kitchen table, clipping box tops for submission to General Mills waiting for labor to start with my youngest daughter. She started her senior year of high school this year. The time has surely flown by. Many things have changed in PTA over those years too. Most importantly, the faces of our leaders.

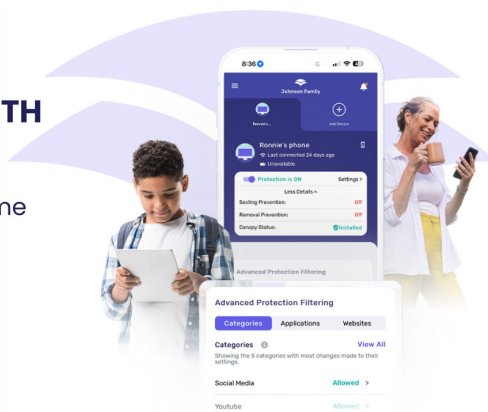
One of my favorite things to do in PTA each year has been to meet, greet, introduce, and welcome people to PTA. When I began in PTA over twenty years ago, I did not know any of the parts of our association. At one of the first meetings, one generous mom, an officer, came up to me and introduced herself. My friend, Judy taught me everything I needed to know of PTA, and as they say, "the rest is history." I always want to make sure that anyone – parent, guardian, family member, community member sees the benefit in being a part of a PTA

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unit. Whether they join my unit or another (in NY or elsewhere), they are supporting our children.

Some years have been easier to recruit than others. Some membership drives just did not drive. The Covid pandemic hit our volunteer base hard. But our units worked to bring members back. Old members, new members..... anyone who wanted to be an advocate, a resource, or a voice for ALL children. We need to continue to reach those individuals. Whether you are just starting out or you have been involved for years, **HAVE THOSE CONVERSATIONS.** Share those stories and talk about your experiences. Greet every new face through the door. Welcome back old friends you haven't seen in a while. Tell them what is new and of all the wonderful ways to be involved. Then remind them that their membership can be enough. Not every person or family can be as involved. And so, we keep repeating those conversations over and over again. You will uncover those potential officers. You will discover new committee leaders. When you do, appreciate the treasure you have found.

For now, it is just the start of a new school year. Programs need to happen, events must be organized, awards need to be ordered, and teachers need to be appreciated. Don't resist the offers of help from unfamiliar faces. You were that once too. We have all

heard the "importance of passing the torch." It is a skill – like most that needs to be learned. Stepping aside does not mean running in the opposite direction. Pass the torch with two hands, and a complete explanation. Share information as well as the experiences you have had with equal importance. The future of the unit will be the better for it.

Somewhere between the preschool and elementary years, my husband told me that as our children got older, they would become more fun. Though I did not mind diapers, bottles, or endless winding of the crib mobile, he was right. And thanks to my involvement with PTA, I have had a ring-side seat. As I have watched my children grow, I have learned and grown in PTA too. With Joni Mitchell's Circle Game melody playing endlessly in my head, I wonder how quickly the next eight months will go by. I wonder about the new PTA volunteers I've yet to greet who will be setting up balloon arches before too long. I can almost smell the carnations twelve school years in the making, saying Hello to Goodbye.

Have a terrific year everyone.

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Welcome to the Big Leagues: Promoting PTA Reflections at the Secondary Level

By Kathleen Jenne, NYS PTA Programs Coordinator



If you are anything like me, you'll find yourself wondering how has it all gone by so quickly? This year, I sent a seventh grader and a tenth grader to school on the first day. I felt as if I had double vision, as I could still see them both as a preschooler and a first grader smiling at me as they wrangled with their new backpacks that seemed almost as big as they were. (Really want to feel old? Frozen was just released a couple of years ago, right? Wrong - it opened twelve years ago. Yeah, I know.)

Now that my kids are older, their needs and interests, as well as those of their peers, have changed but there are still pathways to connection we can find to follow them on their journey. One of the paths that I have found is bringing PTA programming to the upper levels. The PARP and Reflections programs, the author visits, the

game nights, they all still have a place at our Middle and High Schools. Just like our kids, they may look a little different but they are still the amazing events we all loved. The question I had was how do they work at a level where kids have so many competing demands on their time, from clubs and sports, to hours of Chem homework and late night shifts at Wegmans.

[Reflections](#) was the first program I thought of introducing to my unit because the Arts are so vital to teens. [According to a report by the National Endowment for the Arts](#), "arts participation [among high school students] was positively correlated with social-emotional attributes during ninth grade, while arts course completion was linked with greater academic achievement, high school graduation, and post-graduation outcomes."

Why the Arts Matter for Our Teens

- Academic benefits (creativity, problem-solving, improved performance in ALL core content areas).
- Social-emotional benefits (self-expression, personal and academic stress relief, identity development).
- College/career readiness (arts participation builds skills in collaboration, leadership, innovation).

For those of you who aren't familiar with it (and I was among your ranks just a few months ago), Reflections is a National PTA program that, "for over 50 years, Reflections has helped students explore their own thoughts, feelings and ideas, develop artistic literacy, increase confidence and find a love for learning. <https://www.pta.org/home/programs/reflections>...each year, hundreds of thousands of students in pre-K through grade 12 create original works of art in response to a student-created theme."

For many students, the level of engagement they had with the arts in elementary school is not sustained through high school. Whether it is dropping Orchestra in favor of AP Euro or deciding not to take an art elective after getting that Studio Art credit they needed, many of our students just



don't have the room or opportunity to add arts electives to an already crowded schedule. You can help fill this gap. How? By having your PTA or PTSA unit offer a Reflections program.

If you want to make your Reflections program a success:

- One of the best ways to promote it is to partner with the faculty at your school. Coordinate a meeting with department chairs and teachers and show them how the [Reflections theme](#) (this year it is "I belong") and



categories can fit into their curriculum. Ask them to offer extra credit to students who participate or even make it into a class assignment. Ask faculty members and administrators to be judges.

- Encourage students to promote participation among their peers. You could offer a referral fee in the form of an event ticket discount or some spirit wear swag to anyone who gets a friend to compete.
- Reach out to the libraries and town halls in your community and ask them to display the winning entries. (You'll have to get a little more creative with the displays for the music and film entries but it is well worth it!)
- Engage the extra-curricular

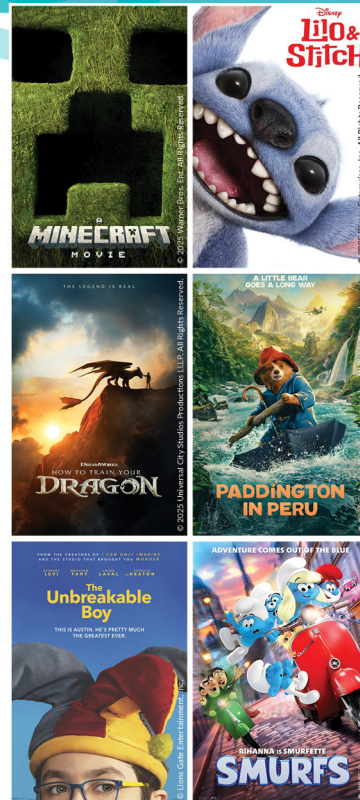
advisors in your program. The Art Club, Drama Club, Band, etc. are all perfect for finding kids who would be interested in an opportunity like this. Don't forget to mention that not only is it a Local, Regional, State, and National level competition but winning at any level would be an amazing addition to their college applications.

- Offer prizes to your participants and partner with local businesses for contributions to this. What teen wouldn't like to win a gift certificate to the local coffee shop, pizza place, or book store?

As our kids grow up and prepare for life after high school, it is more important than ever for families and friends to engage in their school community. Reflections offers a pathway for caretakers to encourage our teens to express themselves through the arts and, in doing so, also get to learn our kids (and maybe even ourselves) better. Start a Reflections program at your unit this fall. You won't regret it.

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How Does New York State's Smartphone Ban Impact My Child's IEP or 504 Plan?

*By Nicholas A. Marricco, Senior Associate
at Tully Rinckey PLLC*



New York State's new smartphone ban in schools has left parents and guardians wondering how the ban might impact their student's individualized education plan (IEP) or 504 Plan.

New York state Gov. Kathy Hochul's smartphone ban, included in her "distraction-free school" policy approved as part of the New York State Fiscal Year 2026 state budget, is now in effect the 2025-2026 school year. This law is in the spirit of earlier actions by New York state in targeting social media usage by minors, such as the SAFE For Kids Act, which limits addictive social media feeds, and the Child Data Protection Act, which prevents companies from collecting a minor's data. The new law's stated purpose is to help protect and care for students' mental health and promote student

success in the digital age.

The "bell-to-bell" smartphone ban requires that districts ban all personal internet-enabled devices including smartphones, tablets and smartwatches on school grounds for the entire school day. This requires all devices be switched off and stored throughout the day, and districts were required to submit plans on managing devices. Passed by both the New York State Senate and Assembly, the ban was signed into law by Hochul as part of the 2026 state budget, and applies to public school districts, charter schools, and BOCES schools. Private schools and higher education institutions are not covered by the law.

Exceptions to the Ban, Including IEPs & 504 Plans

Fortunately, for students with IEPs or 504 Plans, there are exceptions for the use of devices

to manage a medical condition, language translation, specific educational purposes, and the use of devices as part of a child's IEP or 504 Plan.

The policy may not prohibit the use of an internet-enabled device where the use is included in a student's IEP or 504 Plan.

IEPs are written documents that outline the specific educational needs, goals, and services required for a student with disabilities. The primary purpose of an IEP is to ensure that students have access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment possible. IEPs are mandated by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

A 504 Education Plan is a formal document that outlines accommodations and supports students with disabilities, ensuring they have equal access to education under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Further, while the general use of internet-enabled devices is restricted, the written policy may authorize student use of such a device on an instructional day under specific circumstances including:

- if authorized by a teacher, principal, or local education agency for a specific educational purpose;
- when necessary for the management of a student's health care;
- in the event of an emergency;
- for translation services; and
- for a student who is routinely responsible for the care and well-being of a family member.

It is important for parents and guardians to address the use of

technology regarding a student's IEP or 504 Plan, or other needs. There is already significant litigation over the funding of devices and technology regarding IEPs, and it is expected that this litigation will increase with the smart phone ban moving forward.

What's Included the Smartphone Ban

The smartphone ban prohibits unsanctioned use of smartphones and other internet-enabled personal devices on school grounds in K-12 schools for the entire school day. Districts have been allowed to create their own plans for storing smartphones and other devices; all schools and BOCES programs were required to submit their policies by Aug. 1.

The governor's plan includes \$13.5 million in funding for schools who need to purchase storage solutions, and also requires that schools provide parents a way to contact their children during the day when necessary. However, it is currently unclear how districts will ensure that is possible.

Specifically, the statewide standard for distraction-free schools in New York includes the following:

- No unsanctioned use of smartphones and other internet-enabled personal devices on school grounds in K-12 schools for the entire school day (from "bell to bell"), including classroom time and other settings like lunch and study hall periods.
- Allows schools to develop their own plans for storing smartphones during the day — giving administrators and teachers the flexibility to do what works best for their buildings and students.
- Secures \$13.5 million in funding to be made available

for schools that need assistance in purchasing storage solutions to help them go distraction-free.

- Requires schools to give parents a way to contact their kids during the day when necessary.
- Requires teachers, parents and students to be consulted in developing the local policy.
- Prevents inequitable discipline.

Students will still be authorized to have access to simple cellphones without internet capability, as well as internet-enabled devices officially provided by their school for classroom instruction, such as laptops or tablets used as part of lesson plans.

"New York was the first state to target addictive social media feeds — and now we're the largest state to restrict smartphones in schools throughout the entire school day," Hochul stated in May 2025, when the ban was announced. "I know our young people succeed when they're learning and growing, not clicking and scrolling — and that's why New York continues to lead the nation on protecting our kids in the digital age."

Parents or guardians of students with IEP or 504 Plans are strongly encouraged to review their

district's code of conduct to learn about their district's smartphone discipline policy.

Tully Rinckey attorneys understand that issues surrounding disability accommodations in education can be challenging, and they will handle your matter with the attention and tact it deserves. If you have additional questions about your rights as a student with a disability, our team of attorneys is available to assist you today. Please call (888) 677-2608 to schedule a consultation, or schedule a consultation online.

Nicholas A. Marricco is a Senior Associate in Tully Rinckey PLLC's Manhattan Office, where he focuses his practice on Education Law, Special Education Law, Higher Education Law, Federal Employment Law, and New York State Employment Law. Nicholas has also represented countless families of children with special needs in CSE meetings, CPSE meetings, manifestation determinations, and Impartial Hearings. He is among the few New York State Special Education Attorneys who had an IEP and received special education services as a child. Nicholas' parents fought for his education as a child and now he zealously advocates for all his clients like his parents did for him. Article Link: <https://www.tullylegal.com/resources/articles/how-does-new-york-states-smartphone-ban-impact-my-childs-iep-or-504-plan/>



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Fall Into Environmental Fun!

By Maria Sanders, NYS PTA Environment Specialist

The school year is in full swing, and fall is the perfect season to embrace environmental awareness in fun and meaningful ways. As the leaves change, there are plenty of opportunities for students, teachers, and families to connect with nature, learn, and make a positive impact on our planet.

This is also the perfect time for PTAs to start planning and taking action toward earning the 2026 Environment Excellence Recognition! By incorporating sustainable practices into school and community events, PTAs can help make a lasting difference.

Fall Environmental Efforts

Composting: Start a compost bin with leaves and food scraps.

- **PTA Action:** Host a “Leaf Drive” or composting workshop.

Energy Awareness: Turn off lights, unplug devices, and layer up to save energy.

- **PTA Action:** Run a “Lights Out Friday” or “Unplug Week” challenge.

Healthy Air & Idling Awareness: Remind families not to idle cars during drop-off/pick-up to reduce emissions.

- **PTA Action:** Launch an “Idle-Free Zone” campaign with signs at school entrances.

Fun Fall Activities

Nature Scavenger Hunt: Spot colorful leaves, fall flowers, seeds, or migrating birds.

- **PTA Action:** Organize a family scavenger hunt at school or a local park.

Outdoor Learning: Study trees, wildlife, and weather outside.

- **PTA Action:** Support teachers with supplies like clipboards or field guides.

Recycling Art: Use leaves, pinecones, or recyclables for crafts.

- **PTA Action:** Host an “Eco-Art Day” and display student creations. Consider setting up an arts and crafts area at your PTA meetings. HS students can volunteer to help and even earn service hours. It’s a great way to encourage more families to attend meetings while giving kids a fun, hands-on experience!

Be Mindful Of

Litter & Wildlife: Clean up fallen trash around school grounds to protect local wildlife.

- **PTA Action:** Coordinate a community clean-up day and invite families to participate

Allergens & Safety: Be aware of pollen, mold from leaves, and slippery surfaces on wet foliage.

- **PTA Action:** Share seasonal safety reminders with families.

Sustainable Decorations: Choose natural or reusable décor

instead of single-use plastics.

- **PTA Action:** Encourage classrooms to create fall décor from reusable or natural materials for school events and displays.

Fall is a wonderful time to engage students in environmental learning while enjoying the beauty of the season. National PTA’s Healthy Lifestyles: Healthy Earth program has ready-to-use tools to reduce waste, boost wellness, and inspire families. Check it out: pta.org/HealthyEarth. With small, mindful efforts, we can make a lasting impact, one leaf, one snack, and one classroom at a time!

PUMPKIN OAT ENERGY BITES

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup rolled oats
- ½ cup pumpkin puree
- ¼ cup honey or maple syrup
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp nutmeg
- ¼ cup mini chocolate chips or raisins (optional)



DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix all ingredients in a bowl until well combined.
2. Roll into 1-inch balls and place on a baking sheet.
3. Chill for at least 30 minutes.
4. Enjoy a seasonal treat that’s healthy and reduces packaging waste!

Back-to-School Health, Safety & Kindness: Parent-to-Parent Tips

By Biena DePena- MPA, NYS Literacy Specialist

It's that time again—fresh notebooks, new sneakers, and the endless search for the pencils (seriously, where do they all go?). Back-to-school season is exciting, but let's be honest—it's also a juggling act for parents. Between drop-offs, busy schedules, and the occasional “I can't find my other shoe!” meltdown, it's easy to feel overwhelmed.

As parents, we all want the same thing: healthy, safe, kind kids who are ready to thrive. Here's a practical, parent-tested guide—with some eye-opening stats, literacy boosters, and doable tips—to help us start the year strong.

Healthy Kids Learn Better

Healthy routines make a big difference in how kids show up at school.

- Sleep is non-negotiable. Kids ages 6–12 need 9–12 hours of sleep nightly, and teens need 8–10—yet about 60% of middle schoolers and 70% of high schoolers don't get enough sleep ([CDC Sleep and Health Data](#)). Create a realistic bedtime routine—ours is 9:30 p.m.—and mornings get so much smoother.
- Fuel them right. Kids who eat breakfast perform better on memory, attention, and tests compared to those who skip it ([CDC Nutrition Facts](#)). Keep it simple—protein, whole grains, and fruit. Let your child help choose snacks; a healthy mix of “fun” and nutritious works

best.

- Get moving. Only 24% of U.S. kids ages 6–17 get the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity ([CDC Physical Activity Guidelines](#)). Encourage walking or biking to school, after-dinner bike rides, or living room dance parties. We're always dancing at our house—movement counts in all forms!

Build Literacy into Everyday Life

Strong literacy skills help kids in every subject, and family engagement matters!

- Read together for 20 minutes a day—yes, even with teens! Programs like Pick a Reading Partner (PARP) encourage reading as a family habit. <https://nyspta.org/home/programs/literacy/?amp>
- Keep books everywhere: the car, the living room, even the bathroom. Kids read what's within reach.
- Model reading—kids who see parents reading are more likely to read themselves.
- Visit your local library and ask about reading challenges. Many offer rewards and fun events.

Safety First!

With independence comes responsibility. A few reminders:

- Walking & biking: Practice



your child's route, use crosswalks, and wear helmets. Teach them to look both ways and be aware of “stranger danger.”

- Bus basics: School buses are among the safest vehicles [School Bus Safety | Bus Stops, Drivers | NHTSA](#) but rules still matter: stay seated, wait for a full stop, and cross in front of the bus.
- Backpack check: Make sure their bag isn't too heavy (aim for <10–15% of their body weight) and contains only what's school-approved.
- Digital safety: With more kids online, teach open communication about screen time, cyberkindness, and reporting anything that feels wrong. Common Sense Media has great parent tips. [30 Great Lesson Plans for Internet Safety | Common Sense Education](#)

- Basic ID: Make sure your child knows their full name, address, and at least one trusted adult's phone number.

Raising Kind Kids

Academics matter, but kindness shapes character. Kids who perform kind acts show higher self-esteem and less stress [The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation | The Science of Kindness](#)

Encourage your kids to:

1. Sit with someone new at lunch.
2. Offer to help a classmate.
3. Thank teachers, bus drivers, and cafeteria staff.
4. Speak up if they see a peer being mistreated.

These small acts create ripple

effects that strengthen entire school communities.

For Busy & Single Parents (I See You)

If your mornings feel like a reality TV show or a telenovela you're not alone. About 23% of U.S. children live with a single parent <https://pewrsr.ch/2LLvbxW>

Balancing work, homework, and after-school chaos is tough.

- Prep ahead: Lay out clothes and pack lunches at night. A day-of-the-week clothes organizer is a game changer
- Find your village: Lean on after-school programs, carpools, neighbors, and friends. Community helps.
- Quick meals count: Kids who eat dinner with their family 3+

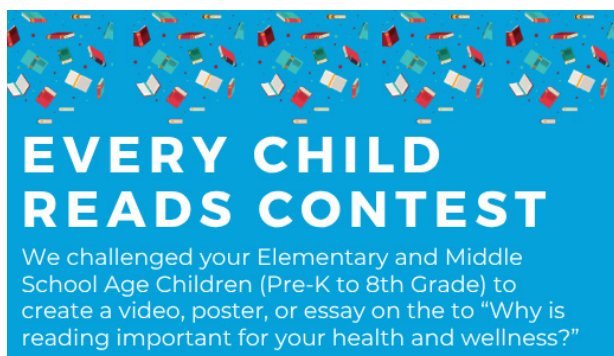
nights a week perform better academically and behaviorally (The Family Dinner Project – Research). Even sandwiches at the table count.

- Grace over perfection: Your kids don't need a perfect parent—they need a present one. You're doing better than you think.

Back-to-school isn't just about new supplies—it's a chance for fresh routines, stronger connections, and building lifelong skills like literacy, kindness, and healthy habits.

So, parent to parent: take a deep breath. None of us get it perfect (spoiler: no one does). With love, patience, and maybe a little extra coffee, we've got this—together.

Happy back-to-school season!



GRAND PRIZE WINNER:
ARIANNA FRASER- NORTHERN PARKWAY SCHOOL,
NASSAU REGION

OVERALL WINNERS:

GRADES PRE-K - 2:

Caroline Boecherer- Edna Louise Spear Elementary School, Suffolk Region
Hudson Knopf- Smithtown Elementary School, Suffolk Region

GRADES 3-5:

Charlotte Yu- Vanderbilt Elementary School, Suffolk Region
Yusuf Sultan- Patricia A Dichiario Early Childhood School - WEPR

GRADES 6-8:

All Students from - Herricks Middle School, Nassau Region

Preston Young
Sophia (Zhirou) Wang
Sophia Chen
Tessa Qiu

SPECIAL ARTIST:

Austin DAmico- Udall Middle, Suffolk Region
Vivian Santiago- St Phillip and St James School, Suffolk Region

Students were challenged to create a poster, video, or essay to express their feelings on why literacy is critical to health and wellness, and these awards serve as a means to honor students who demonstrate this theme.

Through this contest, NYS PTA received 145 entries from students of all grade levels. Of these 145 entries, 1 grand prize winner and 10 student entries were awarded prizes based on their submission of a video, poster, or essay on the topic of "Why is reading important for your health & wellness?"

[Click Here to view all the submissions!](#)