

NEW YORK

PARENT TEACHER

BACK TO SCHOOL 2026

A PUBLICATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION



Measure the Impact!

By Patricia Frazier, NYS PTA President

It is that time of year when we look to the joy of gathering (at PTA meetings and more) and that which we are grateful for. At NYS PTA, we are thankful for each one of our members – a thought that has not changed in 130 years! The number of our members will always amplify our voice and our mission-focused efforts.

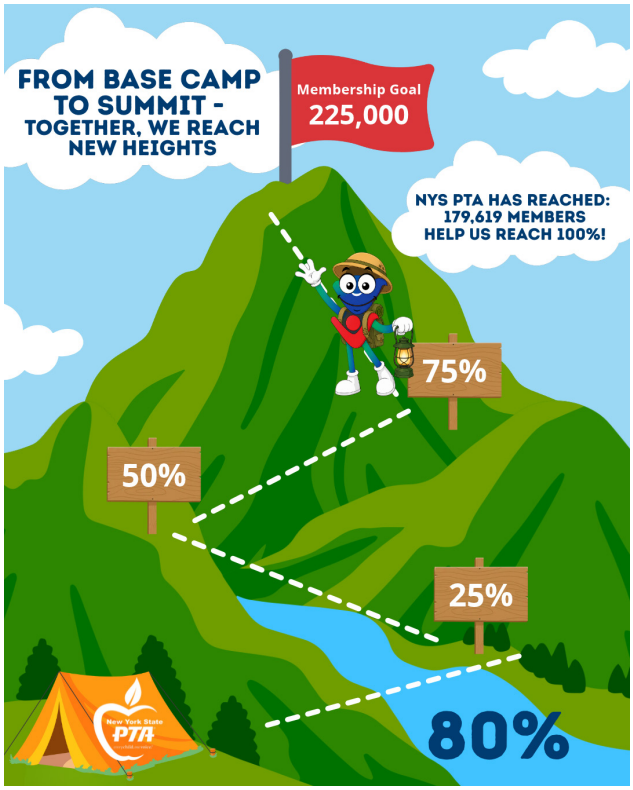
The 26-27 NYS PTA year began at the Summer Leadership Conference in July. With the theme, "Camp PTA, Adventure Awaits!", we explored the critical skills our leaders need to be effective in their roles while gearing up with a fun camping theme. And now our "campers" are putting what they learned into practice! A quick scan of social media posts by PTA units is already showing the results with activity nights, trunk or treat events and homecoming festivities.

Our camping theme even inspired a new type of "thermometer" to help us track our membership progress toward the highest height. Besides the accomplishment of reaching and exceeding our collective goal, we know that together we are also significantly contributing to our national organization. If you have not visited lately, take a look at the National PTA's website here for news and resources.

Go Membie!

Keeping our organization strong and relevant at every level is key to achieving our mission. Being mission-focused gives our units a concise way to plan their initiatives, events and activities that will in turn help them measure their success.

Our "experts" also known as the Governance Team members stand by ready to assist our units and councils as needed. Here are some of the ways we have been measuring our mission at NYS PTA.



Raising our voices -both in volume and number- on behalf of all children is the definition of PTA. The Membership Team has added a layer of fun challenges with awards to involve our units and mark their achievements. We continue to strengthen the presence of our youth led by our two youth state board members. Youth representatives from each region actively participate at the Summer Leadership Conference, Convention and Lobby Day.

Engaging our families is a priority. The Family Engagement Special Committee has introduced a quarterly newsletter "Be PTA Engaged" and we are happy to share that 33 units along with their school communities were recognized as Schools of Excellence by National PTA for 2025-2027. To encourage participation at all grade levels in the Pick A Reading Partner program, the Literacy Committee has recently introduced grants. After wrapping up the 25-26 Reflections program with the theme of "I Belong" with our virtual

Celebration of the Arts for all to see, the Arts Committee is kicking off the 26-27 program with the theme of “What My Culture Means to Me” offering webinars to assist local program chairpersons

Our advocacy efforts are woven throughout the year. The Resolutions Committee is preparing to present a series of new, updated, retained and rescinded resolutions at Convention (link to packet). Check out our Facebook posts throughout the week with simple but effective tips for better days shared by the members of the Wellness Team. The Mental Health Task Force continues to host monthly webinars to share vital information to support families and caregivers in meeting the needs of our children and youth.

Overall, the Field Team and Leadership Development Team provide the foundation for supporting and sustaining our local units and councils. They are committed to inspiring, informing and instructing our leaders and volunteers in their work to make every child’s potential a reality.

130th Annual Convention
Beyond Measure
Celebrating PTA
November 13-15 2026, Saratoga Springs, NY

Celebrate the Impact!

Preparations are underway for the 130th Convention being held in beautiful Saratoga Springs, November 13-15. Throughout the weekend, we will be celebrating the influence of PTA in our units, communities, Albany, Washington DC, and everywhere else that we carry out our mission on behalf of every child. We will be cheering for the extraordinary people and programs that keep the education and well-being of our children in the forefront.

And if you missed the online registration period and a road trip to the north country is in your plans, you can register on-site to attend.

For me, Saratoga Springs is where my time as NYS PTA President began in 2024. I am deeply grateful to have worked alongside the most amazing Governance Team, fabulous staff, and supportive Past Presidents and Consultants. As I look forward to my next chapter in PTA, I do so



with immense appreciation for all we have accomplished together and for everyone who continues to make a difference in the lives of children and families.

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Back to School, Back to Reading

Building Strong Literacy Habits at Home.

By Biena Depena- MPA, NYS Literacy Specialist

It's that time again—fresh notebooks, new backpacks, packed lunches, busy mornings, and the familiar search for missing pencils and shoes. Back-to-school season can feel exciting, but for families, it can also mean adjusting to new routines, schedules, homework, activities, and responsibilities.

As we settle into the new school year, one of the most important habits we can help our children build is also one of the simplest: reading regularly and making literacy part of everyday life.

Strong literacy skills support children in every subject, but reading is about much more than academic success. Reading helps children build confidence, curiosity, imagination, communication skills, and a better understanding of the world around them. The good news is that supporting literacy at home does not have to feel like another assignment.

Make Reading Part of the Routine

One of the easiest ways to encourage reading is to make it part of the family routine. Set aside 15 to 20 minutes a day for reading. For younger children, that might mean sharing a book together before bedtime. Older children and teens may prefer reading independently, listening to an audiobook, or reading something connected to their interests.

Programs such as Pick a Reading Partner **(PARP)** remind us that reading can also be a shared experience. A reading partner can be a parent, grandparent, sibling, caregiver, teacher, or another trusted adult.

Reading together does not have an age limit. Families can talk about books, articles, current events,etc. Sometimes simply asking, "What are you reading?" can open the door to a great conversation.

Let Children Choose!

Not every child will enjoy the same books—and that is okay.

Graphic novels, comics, magazines, biographies, sports articles, poetry, cookbooks, audiobooks, and age-appropriate online articles all provide opportunities to practice reading and build literacy skills.

Instead of focusing only on what we think children should read, try asking, "What would you like to learn more about?" Finding the right topic or format can make all the difference for a reluctant reader.

Make Books Easy to Find!

Children are more likely to read when books are accessible.

Keep books in places where your family spends time—bedrooms, the living room, the car, or even the kitchen. Families do not need an expensive home library. School libraries, public libraries, Little Free Libraries, book swaps, and



community organizations are wonderful resources for finding books at little or no cost.

A regular trip to the local library can also become a fun family tradition. Encourage children to explore the shelves and choose books that spark their curiosity.

Let Them See You Read!

Children pay attention to what the adults around them do.

When children see parents and caregivers reading books, newspapers, recipes, magazines, or online articles, they begin to understand that reading is not simply something they do for school.

Talk about what you are reading. Share something interesting you learned. Tell them about a character you like or a story that surprised you.

Build Literacy Into Everyday Life!

Ask your child to help read a recipe while cooking, create the grocery list, read road signs, write a thank-you note, or look up information about something they are curious about.

Conversations also build literacy. Asking questions like “What do you think?” “Why do you think that happened?” or “What would you have done differently?” helps strengthen comprehension, vocabulary, and critical-thinking skills.

Start Small and Celebrate Progress

Not every child will become an enthusiastic reader overnight. Some children struggle with reading, while others simply have not discovered what they enjoy yet.

A finished chapter. A new library card. A favorite comic book. Reading to a younger sibling or cousin. Choosing a book without being asked.

As the school year begins, families do not need a complicated literacy plan. Start with one realistic goal and build from there.

Because every book, every conversation, and every story shared together helps create something bigger: confident, curious children who understand the power of reading and the value of their own voices.

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Reflections and PARP:

Your Secret Weapon for Boosting Family Engagement

By Kathleen Jenne, NYS PTA Programs Coordinator

It's the beginning of the school year, and once again you find yourself in the school library on a weekday evening, looking around at everyone who came out for your PTA meeting. There's your best friend, serving on the board alongside you, as you have for years. Brittany, Sam and Courtney are sitting together at the usual table. Lexi and Matt are joining via Zoom, their black boxes looming over the smartboard. "This is a good turnout. It's going to be another great year!" you think as you take a breath before opening the meeting.

If you nodded along, please know that we've all been there. But our PTA shouldn't look the same year after year. It shouldn't be just me and my friends. PTA is for everyone, and your PTA should reflect your school community—not just your social group.

"OK, Kathleen," you're thinking. "We've tried! Families are too busy. We've asked people to volunteer and attend meetings, and they won't. We have to work with what we have."

You're right. Families are incredibly busy, and there are often barriers to access we don't think about. So, shift your thinking. Instead of putting the same energy into getting more people to attend meetings or volunteer, focus on creating meaningful opportunities for family engagement. Those connections can light the spark that inspires families to become a more active participant in their child's learning and enrich the essential partnership between home and the classroom.

Start by asking yourself and your fellow board members: What connections do we want to build this school year? Let that question guide your programming, communications, and decisions. I know you are already doing a million things. You're planning the upcoming PTA family game night while answering your boss's email, coordinating Scarlett's dance class pickup and Grayson's band practice drop-off, and somehow figuring out how everyone will get fed tonight. I see you. You are amazing. YOU are PTA. And you deserve success.

My father-in-law often repeats the old adage, "Work smarter, not harder." This is one of those situations. Draw on the existing programming tools and resources NYS PTA and National PTA have created. Most importantly, make sure everything you do **STARTS WITH THE CHILD.** When children are excited to participate, you create authentic, meaningful experiences that naturally draw families into engagement.

Two programs that are perfect for intentional family engagement, and are near and dear to this Programs Coordinator's heart, are Reflections and PARP.

Reflections

For more than 50 years, the National PTA Reflections Program has invited students of all grades and abilities to explore the arts by creating original works in Dance Choreography, Film Production, Literature, Music Composition, Photography and Visual Arts.

But here's the part we sometimes miss; Reflections isn't just a student program. It's an essential family engagement tool. It gets those conversations about student learning started among families. A child takes a photograph, writes a poem, choreographs a dance, or creates a sculpture. Then a parent asks, "What made you think of that?" A grandparent shares a story about a project they did in school. A sibling offers an idea or decides to create something, too. A caregiver helps find the perfect lighting or a better app for recording music. Suddenly, PTA has created an opportunity for a family to spend time together around something the child cares about. That is family engagement.

And it doesn't require a slide deck or a sign-in sheet.

Build on that energy. Host a community arts night where students create work inspired by the Reflections theme. This year it's "What My Culture Means to Me." Provide materials and collect submissions. Then display the artwork at a Reflections celebration to recognize your winners and invite their families. And now you have a captive audience! You can capitalize on this to increase family involvement. Tell them about your next program, have a guest speaker talk about arts education advocacy work, invite them to join PTA, and offer microvolunteering opportunities. Make it easy to take the next step.

PARP

If Reflections connects families through creativity, Pick a Reading Partner (PARP) connects them through a shared experience that can happen almost anywhere. PARP asks a partner to read with a child for at least 20 minutes each day. That partner can be a parent, grandparent, babysitter, older sibling, cousin, friend, coach, or neighbor. It can be anyone! PARP allows students to pick their person and share with them the powerful engagement experience that collaborative reading provides.

And don't stop at "read with your partner for 20 minutes." Use the program to create natural engagement opportunities and expand your community partnerships. Partner with your public library to host a blind date with a book event or a used-book swap. Collect and share favorite childhood book recommendations from teachers, families, administrators, and local celebrities. Organize a community-wide read. Partner with bookstores, literacy non-profits, and community organizations to expand awareness of and access to resources.

And please, DON'T FORGET YOUR MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES!! Invite families to share books and reading traditions in their home languages. Host bilingual and inclusive meetings and use open captioning via Google Meet or Zoom. Take advantage of NYS PTA's free document translation service in more than 50 languages by emailing translation@nyspta.org. Make a true commitment to inclusivity.

One of the best tips I've gotten on this came from Kim Blasiak, our NYS PTA Programs and Events Associate and a past Family Engagement Coordinator. Have your PTA officers learn a few basic phrases in the most common non-English language in your community: greetings, simple directions, and expressions of gratitude. Something that small can make a family feel welcomed, seen, and wanted. That is everything.

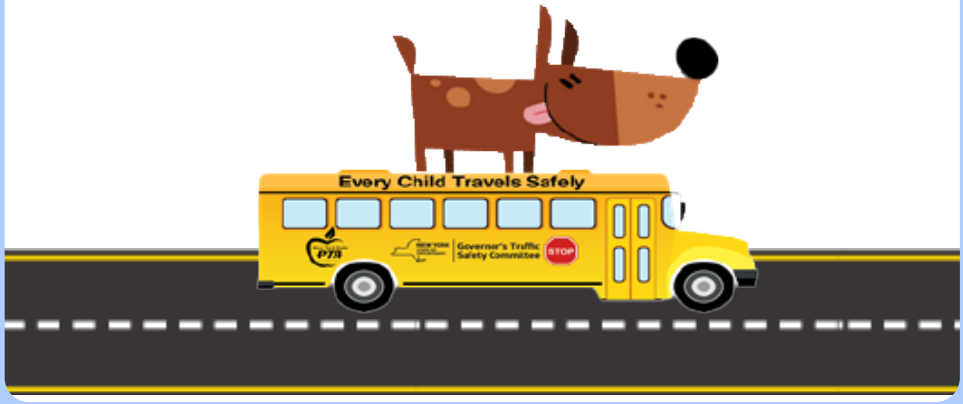
When I say, "family engagement", I don't mean just attending PTA events. To me, adults and children engaged in activities and discussions both at home and in the classroom that weave the two worlds together IS what family engagement is all about. This year, use the child as your starting point. Draw on PTA programming like Reflections and PARP to create meaningful connections. Expand your definition of family engagement. Build and enrich relationships with families and community partners. When you do, families may begin to see PTA as more than the group behind the book fair or the monthly library meeting. They'll experience PTA as what it truly can be: a bridge connecting children, families, schools and communities. And I think you'll find that building those connections creates a richer, fulfilling PTA experience—not only for your community, but for you, too.

EVERY CHILD TRAVELS SAFELY

Start planning for Fall! 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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By Maria Sanders, NYS PTA Membership Coordinator

It's that time of year again. New backpacks, new teachers, new routines and probably a few "Wait, what day is picture day?" moments along the way.

Back-to-school season is also a great time to get connected with your school community. If you've never really considered PTA membership, this might be the year to give it a try.

You don't have to be a "PTA person." You don't have to attend every meeting, volunteer at every event, or take on a committee. You don't even have to know exactly where you fit yet.



Start small.

You're Part of Something Bigger

Across New York State, more than **121,000 people are already part of the NYS PTA community and that number is growing.**

They're parents, grandparents, teachers, caregivers, students, family members, and community members. They all bring something different to PTA, and there's no one way to participate. Maybe you want to volunteer. Maybe you have an idea you'd love to see happen at school. Maybe you're interested in what's going on but aren't sure how to get involved. Or maybe you simply want to support the people doing the work.

All of those are good reasons to be a member.

Not Sure Where to Start?

Try one of these:

- **Go to a meeting.** Listen, meet some people, and see what your PTA is working on.
- **Pick one event.** Help for an hour. Bring snacks. Set up chairs. Take pictures. Small jobs help!
- **Share an idea.** Have a program idea or something you think would be helpful to families? Bring it to your PTA.
- **Ask how you can help.** You might be surprised by how many opportunities don't require a big time commitment.
- **Just become a member.** You don't have to do anything else right away.

So while you're checking off your back-to-school list, add one more:

- **Check out PTA**

You might find a new group of people, a cause you care about, or simply a way to feel a little more connected to your child's school.

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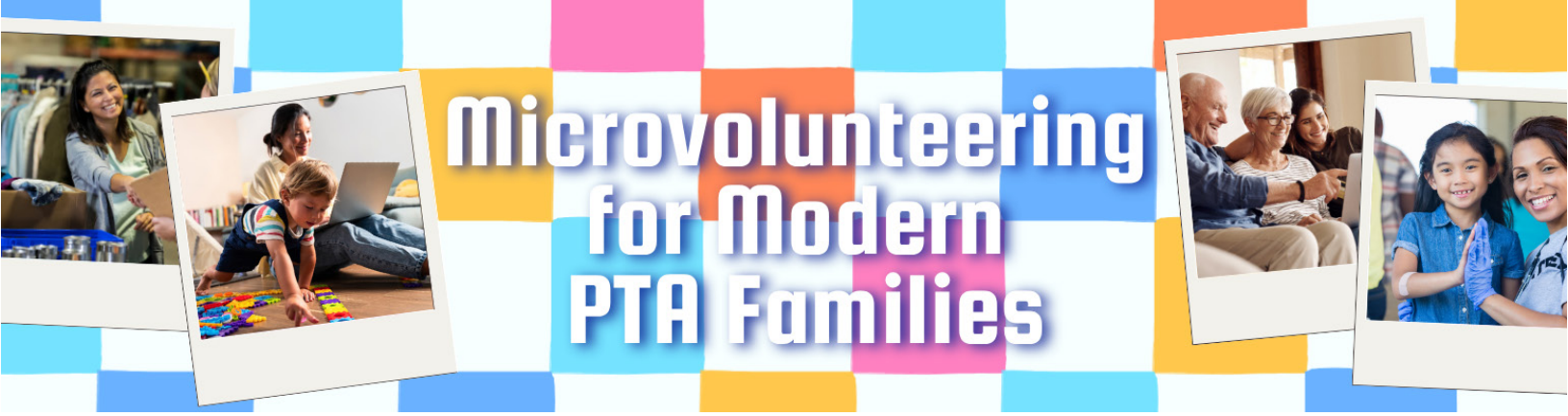
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Microvolunteering for Modern PTA Families

By Danielle Blanchard-St. Louime, Membership Engagement Specialist

I don't have time." "It's too much of a commitment." "I don't know how to help." While these phrases sound eerily similar to the responses I hear from my 16-year-old when I ask about his chores, they're also commonly repeated by potential members or volunteers when approached by PTA leaders. In today's world, where parents are often juggling work, sports, and several other commitments, introducing the concept of microvolunteering can help strengthen the home-school connection while sharing the workload and maybe even developing your unit's future leaders.

What even is microvolunteering?

Simply put, microvolunteering consists of small, flexible, low-commitment tasks that require no special training or background knowledge and can usually be completed in a short amount of time. Perfect for caregivers with unpredictable schedules, they can be done in person or online and therefore remove barriers to participation for many potential helpers. The parent who commutes more than an hour into work can share three social media posts while on the train, and another who can't commit to being Membership Chair full-time can help write notes for Teacher Appreciation Week.

Several areas of PTA work can be supported by microvolunteering, including:

- Events
- Communications
- Fundraising
- Teacher support
- Advocacy
- Family/Member engagement…and much more!

How can microvolunteering work for my PTA?

While microvolunteering may look different for everyone, its main function is providing a way for individuals or groups to accomplish tasks with clearly defined roles and timelines. Use this simple three-part formula to design roles that will help people show up, perform confidently, and participate consistently.

1. One clear task
2. One clear time estimate
3. One clear way to sign up

For example, a social media post requesting volunteers might read something like this: "Got 15 minutes? You can help the PTA. This week's task is to clean out the arts and crafts closet in the gym. Comment 'I'm in' under this post, and we'll contact you with more details!" It might even be helpful to include a note about how this particular ask will benefit your school community and post the results so your "why" becomes a shared point of interest.

Be sure to acknowledge volunteers promptly and often, as we all know that a little bit of gratitude can go a long way. When parents feel not only recognized but appreciated, they are more likely to continue being involved and engaged.

Microvolunteering Quick Task Sheet

Below are some examples of tasks that can be done by PTAs at all levels. Select one from each category and see how your unit can implement it today!

At Home

1. Cut materials for teachers
2. Assemble information packets or folders
3. Prep labels for prizes
4. Translate a short message or flyer

Digital

1. Share a PTA post
2. Send 3 fundraiser reminder emails
3. Comment on two social media posts to increase engagement
4. Create a flyer on Canva

Event Support

1. Collect tickets/scan QR codes for entry
2. Bring one food item
3. Set up membership table
4. Guide foot traffic to restrooms or event stations



Congratulations to Deauville Gardens West PTA in Suffolk Region, one of the local PTAs selected to receive a HERE for Healthy Schools: Quality Time Off (QTO) Grant! Deauville Gardens West PTA will receive funding and donated products to help create welcoming environments where students and families can connect.

National PTA teamed up with Lysol to support school environments through its HERE for Healthy Schools program. The HERE for Healthy Schools: Quality Time Off (QTO) Grant, funded by Lysol, provides funding and resources to help PTAs create meaningful in-school experiences, designed to foster connection, engagement and lasting memories for families nationwide.

Deauville Gardens West PTA will receive:

- $2,000 to help enhance your PTA's planned family engagement activities
- 50 Lysol products including Lysol Disinfecting Wipes intended to help reduce the spread of illness-causing germs* on surfaces in classrooms and common areas on campus.

Meaningful school moments, like read-a-thons and field trips, create lasting memories for children and strengthen connections between students and their parents. Yet families often miss out on these special occasions due to unexpected illnesses and the need to reserve personal time off (PTO) for sick days. In fact, 78% of parents who missed an important school-day event did so because they had already used their available PTO when their child was home sick.

To help families stay present for the moments that matter most, National PTA's HERE for Healthy Schools: Quality Time Off (QTO) Grant, funded by Lysol. As an extension of Lysol's HERE for Healthy Schools initiative, launched in 2019, the grant reinforces the commitment to helping reduce the spread of illness-causing germs* on surfaces in classrooms nationwide.



To qualify for the L.E.A.D. Pin, attend or watch at least six webinars, apply what you've learned in your unit or district, and complete the L.E.A.D. Award Contest Form to share your experience. Once you complete these steps, you'll earn the L.E.A.D. Pin as recognition of your commitment to leadership and growth.



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CALLING ALL PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS!

By Lynn Petrofsky, NYS PTA Awards Coordinator

Do you know someone who would be interested in one of these awards?

The following awards are open and we can't wait to receive your applications.

- Innovative Teacher Grant - This grant gives innovative teachers the opportunity to put their ideas into action. It is awarded to worthy projects that significantly influence student learning. The deadline is 10/31.
- Susanne Smoller Commitment to Advocacy Youth Award - This award will be given to one high school senior to encourage them to pursue post-secondary education or training and to continue their active engagement in advocacy in the areas of HIV/AIDS, the LGBTQ+ community, mental health, social justice, or substance use.
- Jenkins Memorial Scholarship for Teacher Education - The Jenkins Memorial Scholarship was inaugurated in October 1946, as a special Golden Anniversary Project. In 1947 the fund was established as a permanent project as a living memorial to the young people who lost their lives in military service during WWII and was named for one of them, Clifford N. Jenkins, Jr., son of Margaret Jenkins, New York State PTA President 1944-1947 and National PTA President 1961-1964. This award helps outstanding students prepare for the teaching profession.

COMING SOON…….

- Youth Humanitarian Award in Memory of Stanley Marcus - This award recognizes a junior or senior high school student who best exemplifies the humanitarian principles of Stanley Marcus, who is remembered for his humanitarianism and dedication to youth through zealous volunteer community service.
- Teacher Fellowship for Graduate Study in Memory of Richard Gazzola - This encourages excellent teachers to stay in the classroom by providing an opportunity to improve teaching skills, update professional knowledge and expand professional perspectives.



New York State PTA would like to congratulate Namiko Suga, from Syosset High School PTSA in Nassau Region for being the 2026 Recipient of the Leadership Award in Honor of Jane Skrzypek Award. Namiko has gone over and above as a volunteer leader and inspired others to do the same. Congratulations Namiko!

Honor a Special Volunteer in Your PTA

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!

LOOK FOR THE

LIGHTS



What's in Your School's Water?

Clear, clean-tasting water doesn't always equal safer, healthier filtered water. Without filtration, water can contain harmful contaminants like lead, PFAS and microplastics that can't be seen, smelled or tasted. That's why it's critical to ensure your school is serving filtered water.



How Do I Know if My School Provides Filtered Water?

Even if you've seen bottle filling stations at your school, it doesn't mean that water is filtered. The only way to ensure a bottle filler is filtered is to look for the filter lights.

How Can I Take Action?

If you discover that your school's bottle fillers aren't filtered, advocate for filtered water by:

- Raising the issue at a PTA or school board meeting
- Speaking to or emailing your principal
- Starting or joining a petition
- Spreading the word on social media

Start the Conversation

Scan the QR code to find resources that'll help you start the conversation, including talking points, email templates and more.

GET STARTED

Family Engagement Starts at Home

By Velida (Val) Ford, Family Engagement Coordinator

A new school year brings new teachers, new routines, new friendships, and new opportunities to connect. And one of the most important connections your child can have begins at home.

You don't have to attend every meeting, volunteer at every event, or have hours of extra time to be an engaged parent. Sometimes, family engagement starts with one simple question:

"Tell me about your day."

Between school, work, activities, appointments, and family responsibilities, it can be difficult to find time to do one more thing. The good news is that family engagement doesn't have to be complicated.

It's about connection, communication, and showing your child that their education and their experiences matter.

Make Time for Small Conversations

Some of the best opportunities for connection happen during everyday moments: in the car, at the dinner table, while making dinner, or before bedtime.

Instead of asking, "How was school?" try:

- What was the best part of your day?
- What was something new you learned?
- Did anything make you laugh today?
- Was there anything that was difficult?
- Did you learn something you didn't expect?
- If you could change one thing about your school day, what would it be?

These questions can open the door to conversations that go beyond a simple "fine."

You don't need to have a long conversation every day. Sometimes, five minutes of genuine attention can make a big difference.

Start the School Year Connected

The beginning of the school year is a great time to establish simple routines that help your family stay connected to school.

Consider taking a few minutes to:

- Review your school's calendar and important dates.
- Learn how your child's teacher prefers to communicate with families.
- Make sure your contact information is up to date with the school.
- Find out what family and student resources are available.
- Talk with your child about their hopes and goals for the new school year.
- Ask your child what helps them feel comfortable, supported, and ready to learn.



And remember, communication is a two-way street. Families should feel comfortable reaching out to teachers and school staff with questions, concerns, or information that may help support their child.

Family Engagement Can Look Different for Every Family

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to being an engaged family.

For some families, it might mean volunteering at school or attending PTA meetings. For others, it might mean reading together, checking homework, communicating with a teacher, or talking about what happened at school that day.

Every family has different schedules, responsibilities, cultures, and needs.

What matters is finding what works for your family.

Consider ways you can participate:

- Attend a school or PTA event when you can.
- Join a meeting virtually if available.
- Complete a school or PTA survey and share your ideas.
- Volunteer for a project that can be done from home.
- Read school communications and stay informed.
- Share your child's interests, strengths, and concerns with

their teacher.

- Participate in a family activity at school or at home.
- Introduce yourself to another family in your school community.

Even small actions can help families feel more connected to their school community.

Your Voice Matters

Parents and caregivers know their children in ways no one else does. Your observations, questions, ideas, and experiences are valuable.

If something is working well, share it. If something isn't working for your family, speak up. If you have an idea that could make participation easier for families, let your PTA or school know.

Family engagement isn't just about families participating in what schools offer. It's also about schools and PTAs listening to families and creating opportunities that meet families where they are.

Your voice can help make your school community stronger and more welcoming for everyone.

Try This at Home

The 10-Minute Connection Challenge, set aside just 10 minutes to do something together without distractions.

You could:

- Read a book
- Take a walk
- Look over your child's schoolwork
- Play a game
- Ask about their friends
- Let your child choose the activity

Then ask:

"What is one thing you wish your teacher or school knew about you?"

You may learn something important.

And if 10 minutes doesn't work one day, that's okay. Family engagement isn't a test you can fail. Find another moment that works for your family.

Looking for Resources?

Start with the resources already available in your community.

Check your child's school and district website for:

- Family programs
- Academic support
- School calendars and important dates
- Counseling and student support services
- Community resources
- Important school contacts

Your local PTA/PTSA can also help connect families with school and community resources and provide opportunities to meet other families.

National PTA also offers resources and ideas designed to help families support children's learning and build stronger family-school partnerships.

A Little Connection Goes a Long Way

Being an engaged parent isn't about doing everything.

It's about doing what you can, when you can, in a way that works for your family.



A five-minute conversation, a message to a teacher, attending one school event, reading together, or simply asking your child about their day can help build a stronger connection between home and school.

As we begin a new school year, remember:

Start small. Stay connected. Your involvement matters.

The most meaningful family engagement doesn't always happen at a meeting or a school event. Sometimes, it happens at the kitchen table, in the car, or during those few quiet minutes before bedtime.

This school year, look for those moments. They matter.





REDEFINING WOMEN'S HEALTHCARE ONE MISSING PIECE AT A TIME

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Claim based on 2023 SPARCS data for elective discharges and ambulatory surgeries amongst females

Optimizing Health Starts with Choosing the Right PCP

How to find a primary care doctor who listens, connects and helps prevent problems before they start

Katz Institute for Women's Health sat down with Nancy LaVine, MD, adult primary care physician.



Misinformation in women's health is rampant, in part due to a decades-long vacuum of clinical research about how women's bodies work. Social media attempts to fill the void, offering menopause cures, miracle weight loss supplements, detox concoctions and pills for perfect hair and nails. Unfortunately, many of these miracle solutions are not based on actual medical evidence.

While social media and online communities help women connect and give them a place to discuss sensitive subjects without stigma—they are a double-edged sword. Social media algorithms amplify whatever resonates with users, regardless of scientific validity. Popular trends often don't have clinical evidence to support them, and advice may not properly reflect any given person's real-life situation.

This immense information overload often leaves women confused, vulnerable and without a credible resource to turn to. What women need instead, said Nancy LaVine, MD, a primary care physician at Northwell, is to build a relationship with a doctor they can trust to help make sense of what they find.

That's easier said than done when most primary care doctors spend just minutes with a patient before having to move to the next one. Still, finding the right doctor is worth the effort, LaVine stressed. For starters, a major role of a primary care doctor is to be your medical "sherpa," LaVine explained. "Primary care doctors see themselves as the person who's synthesizing information or treatment plans from different specialists to make sure that your care team remains focused on you as a whole person."

The better a primary doctor knows their patient, the better they can spot changes and trends in their patient's health—and help work to prevent major health issues before they arise. Prevention is the goal of primary care. "We love prevention," LaVine said. "We love talking about how to nip things in the bud before they become an issue. We'll help you if you have diabetes, for example, but we really want to make sure that you don't get diabetes at all."

A good primary doctor is invaluable, but most women may not find a perfect match immediately. "Finding a good PCP might take time and research because it's a lot of trust to put into a person," she explained. "That trust needs to be engendered."

Here's how women can find the right doctor for them:

Crowd source. Though the internet can be rife with misinformation, it can be a worthwhile starting point. Look at reviews to see how patients rate or describe their encounters with a doctor. Find out if the clinician takes your insurance. Ask close friends or even coworkers with the same medical coverage if they have a doctor they really like. And if you have a good relationship with a specialist, like an OB/GYN, ask for recommendations for a primary care doctor within the same office or health system.

Share openly. "A good PCP really wants to know about your life in addition to your family medical history: what stressors you have, what type of work you do, what you do for fun, who you live with and do you have people in your life?" LaVine said. Details about your job, diet or hobbies are not irrelevant. That background becomes a fuller picture over time.

Come prepared. Arrive at your visit with the top three items you want to address. After your appointment, "teach back" to your doctor, summarizing what you heard in your own words to confirm you both understood and agreed on next steps.

Pay attention to how they listen. Look for a doctor who asks a lot of questions about your medical history and your life. "We take notes on the important things to build that whole-person story, and the knowledge builds over time as in other relationships," LaVine said. If you feel rushed, unheard or dismissed, it is time to find someone else.

Expect a team. Look for a doctor who refers you to specialists to address your specific needs, including nutritionists, therapists or

mental health specialists. “Primary care is 100% a team sport,” LaVine noted. “I am quick to bring in specialists. You deserve someone who has years of training in what you’re going through.”

Collaborate on care. Look for a doctor who does not dismiss information you found on your own. Dismissal hurts trust. Instead, look for a doctor who acknowledges your information, validates your efforts, explains what is and isn’t supported by evidence and proposes a plan that may work best for you. LaVine noted the difference between actual misinformation and “misapplied information:” Something that may be true in general but is not right for a particular patient.

Ultimately, the best doctor for you may be the one you communicate best with. “Part of my job is really about communication,” LaVine said. “I want you to trust me. Let’s work on this together. Let’s hear what you have to say. Let’s create a plan that we’re both comfortable with.”



A Healthy, Safe and Well Fall

Supporting the Whole Child and Family

By The NYS PTA Wellness Team

As a new school year begins and the days of fall approach, families are settling back into routines, reconnecting with their school communities, and finding their rhythm between school, activities, work, and family life. It is also a perfect time for PTAs to remind families that a successful school year is about more than academics.

At New York State PTA, we know that health, wellness, mental health, safety, and our environment are all connected. When we support the whole child, we help create school communities where every child can learn, grow, and thrive.

Health: Building Healthy Habits

The beginning of the school year is a natural time to revisit healthy habits. Encourage children to start each day with a nutritious breakfast, drink plenty of water, get adequate sleep, and make time for physical activity. Healthy snacks and lunches can help children stay energized and focused throughout the school day.

Fall is also a good time to make sure routine medical and dental appointments are up to date and that schools have current emergency contact information and any necessary health or medication plans. Small, healthy habits practiced consistently can make a big difference.

Wellness: Making Time to Recharge

The return to school can mean busy calendars, homework, sports, activities, and family responsibilities. Establishing predictable routines can help children feel more secure and prepared for the day ahead. Families can make mornings easier by preparing snacks, clothing, and other essentials the night before. A calm morning, with less noise and softer lighting when possible, can help children ease into the day.

Encourage children—and adults—to prioritize sleep, movement, relaxation, and meaningful connections. A consistent bedtime routine and adequate sleep help recharge the mind and body. Pay attention to when children have the most energy and, when possible, plan homework and activities around those times. Take a walk, spend time outdoors, read together, enjoy a hobby, or simply put down the devices and have a conversation.

As PTA leaders, we can also model healthy boundaries and self-care. Taking care of ourselves helps us continue caring for our children, families, schools, and communities. Wellness is about finding balance and creating routines that support the whole family.

Environment: Creating Healthier Spaces

Our environment plays an important role in our health and well-being. Fall is a great time to take a fresh look at the places where children learn, play, and spend their time.

Simple steps can make a difference: use reusable water bottles and lunch containers, reduce unnecessary waste, conserve water and energy, and dispose of waste properly. Encourage children to spend time outdoors and connect with nature whenever possible.

PTAs can also encourage conversations about healthy school environments, including clean air and water, healthy buildings, green cleaning, and safe outdoor spaces. Teaching children to care for their environment helps build healthier communities today and for the future.

Mental Health: Check In, Listen and Connect

A new school year can bring excitement, but it can also bring stress, worry, and uncertainty. Children may be adjusting to new teachers, new routines, changing friendships, and academic expectations. Emotional structure, predictable schedules, and meaningful connections can help children feel supported as they navigate these changes.

Make time to check in and, most importantly, listen. When children return from school, give them space to share without immediately asking questions, offering advice, or trying to solve the problem. Sometimes, simply knowing that a trusted adult is there to listen helps children process their experiences and work through challenges.

Encourage children to approach challenges with a hopeful perspective by considering what could go right, not only what could go wrong. Remind them that asking for help is a strength and that talking about their feelings is an important part of taking care of their health.

Mental health is an essential part of overall health. Supporting children emotionally, physically, and socially helps families build a healthy, balanced school year.

Safety: Fall Means Changing Conditions

As the days get shorter, safety deserves a place in our back-to-school conversations.

For many families, the afternoon trip home happens closer to dusk as fall progresses. Remind children who walk to or from the bus stop to stay alert, use designated crossings, and wear visible or reflective clothing when lighting is poor.

Bus safety is everyone's responsibility. Children should stand away from the roadway while waiting, remain seated while the bus is moving, keep aisles clear, and follow the driver's directions. Drivers should slow down and watch carefully for children around bus stops, especially during the darker hours of the morning and afternoon.

Fall is also a good time to check smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and replace batteries as recommended by the manufacturer. Take a few minutes to review your family's emergency plan and make sure everyone knows what to do in an emergency.

Together, We Support the Whole Child

PTA has a unique opportunity to bring families, educators, and communities together around the health and well-being of every child. We can share trusted resources, encourage healthy choices, promote mental health awareness, support safe schools and transportation, and help families become good stewards of the environment.

This fall, let's remember that healthy bodies, healthy minds, healthy environments, safety, and strong relationships all work together.

Whether it is a healthy snack, a walk after dinner, a conversation with a child, a reusable water bottle, a reminder about bus safety, or simply taking a moment to check in with someone who may be struggling. Every small step matters.

As we begin another school year, let's make wellness a shared priority and continue working together to support the health, safety, education, and well-being of every child.

Together, we can help every child have a healthy, safe, and successful school year.

Fall Resources for PTA Families

- NYS PTA – Health & Wellness https://nyspta.org/home/parent-resources/health-and-wellness/
- NYS PTA – Every Child Travels Safely https://nyspta.org/home/programsandawards/everychild-travelssafely/
- New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) https://omh.ny.gov/
- Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) https://mhanys.org/
- Healthy Schools Network https://healthyschools.org/
- Northwell Health – Katz Institute for Women's Health https://www.northwell.edu/katz-institute-for-womens-health