

# Partners in Education: The Principal and the PTA

---

Teamwork has become the model for success in business and industry, and often spells success in education as well. It begins at the local school level with a partnership between the principal and parents. When parents and the principal work together, they can lead the way to success for all students. And just as the parents partner with the principal, so does PTA.

What does it mean for PTA and the principal to work as partners? It means that each group understands his or her responsibilities, as well as the others'. It means setting goals and working cooperatively to achieve them. It means respecting each other's opinions—not expecting automatic approval from the other and not withdrawing support if opinions differ. Finally, it means reaching out to all parents and school staff to help our youth reach their potential.

## Two Roles of the Principal: School Official and Partner to Parents

The principal is the educational leader and spokesperson for his or her school and the school community. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, climate of learning, level of professionalism, morale of the staff, and degree of concern for students.

Though the structure of schools differs from community to community, the main duties of the principal usually include:

- Seeing that the school follows the curriculum guidelines adopted by the local school board or site-based management council (group of people, including the principal, teacher representatives, and parent representatives, at the local school level who have decision-making power).
- Helping determine teaching structure and the types of teaching techniques in the school.
- Being involved in the school's procedures for admission, registration, placement, evaluation, maintenance of student records, instruction of all students, and when appropriate, due process.
- Supervising all school personnel, including training and evaluation, hiring, and firing.
- Overseeing the school building—its safety, maintenance, and security.
- Being accountable for budget expenditures and/or preparing the building budget.
- Making sure that the school follows applicable local, state, and federal laws.

## The Principal and Parents: Building the Relationship

All major studies have shown that parent involvement in education is one of the keys to quality education, and it is up to the principal to make parent involvement a school priority. The principal can welcome parents to the school by:

- Being available to the community, scheduling meetings open to the public at various times, and inviting parents to set up private appointments to discuss concerns.
- Working to make parents feel welcome and comfortable at the school.
- Planning for and encouraging parent-teacher conferences by showing parents and teachers how to use conferences to build parent-teacher-student teamwork, and making sure conferences are held at times when parents can come.
- Being sensitive to how home life may affect how parents feel toward school. For example, a parent who is struggling to keep a family housed and fed may have difficulty concentrating on a child's school problems.
- Being active in the PTA and encouraging teachers to participate, too.
- Encouraging the PTA to keep its primary focus on education rather than fundraising. The principal and PTA can work together to solve problems and set goals that will benefit students.
- Helping the PTA plan activities, such as those that promote children's well-being, home-school cooperation, and community betterment. These events often strengthen the school's business and community relationships as well.
- Working with PTA to develop a program for training and using parent and community volunteers who can help staff enrich all areas of the school.
- Helping parents stay informed on current issues in education by referring them to helpful books, magazine articles, TV programs, and websites, or suggesting materials for a parent resource center in the school or local library.
- Recognizing PTA volunteers' efforts and appreciating parent contributions.
- Encouraging constructive discussions with parents that build confidence in the school's leadership and strengthen parent partnerships.

### **The Two Roles of Parents: Child's First Educator and School Partner**

Parents share much of the responsibility for their children's education. Involved parents are those who strive to:

- Send to school a child who is ready and eager to learn, self-disciplined, and prepared to accept the authority of school staff. Parents make sure the child understands and follows school rules.
- Supervise homework assignments as needed.
- Seek the advice of teachers to understand their children's growth and learning, sharing information that will help school staff plan for their children.
- Learn about current school programs, curriculum, regulations, and procedures, and actively support them.
- Show commitment to education by attending parent-teacher conferences, open houses, PTA meetings, student concerts, and other school programs, whenever possible.
- Comprehend and work for the passage of school funding initiatives.
- Understand the need for professional development programs for teachers.
- Attend, when possible, programs to learn about current issues and trends in education, in order to open the way for informed discussion, mutual respect, and teamwork.

## **PTA, Parents, and the Principal: Creating a Partnership**

More and more, parents want to take an active role in their children's education. Being a member of the PTA gives them a way to work together in partnership with the principal by:

- Encouraging the principal to speak openly of his or her goals and concerns.
- Presenting PTA concerns and issues to the principal, developing a forum that allows for frank and open discussion.
- Focusing on education and how to benefit students.
- Working with the principal or site-based management council to set goals and plan programs that will help achieve these goals.
- Being alert to staff and community talents and resources, and drawing on them for the benefit of the entire school.
- Helping the principal promote fair discipline for all children or volunteering to help write a discipline code for the school if one does not exist.
- Working with the principal to develop annual school reports and budgets, and speaking in support of budgets and other issues in front of the school board and local government.
- Keeping information confidential and encouraging every volunteer to honor the ethical considerations and legal responsibilities regarding the privacy of students and their records.

## **Principal and PTA President: Working Together**

The principal and the PTA president represent two important groups in the school: staff and parents. Here are some suggestions for nurturing this important partnership.

- Meet weekly at an agreed upon time to discuss issues, review plans for events, and keep each other informed.
- Work out problems or misunderstandings in a direct, honest way by keeping an open mind and listening to each other.
- Be positive and enthusiastic about your school when working with parents and community.
- Develop a win-win attitude and celebrate each other's accomplishments.
- Remember the value of humor to keep things in perspective; both positions can be quite difficult at times.

## **A Final Word**

The PTA and the principal must strengthen their ties in order to support the education of all children. A working partnership between the principal and the PTA, dedicated to the welfare of all youth, can strengthen family life and improve education throughout the communities we serve.