

## THIS MONTH: SCHOOL SAVVY PARENTS

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## Supporting Teachers

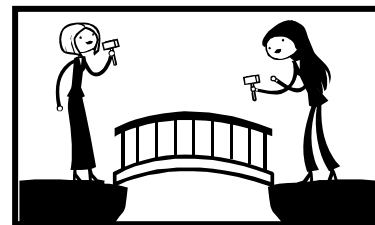
For children to get the most out of their education, teachers need the understanding and support of parents. The PTA/PTSA fosters this support by encouraging parents to be involved in their children's education. Below are a few examples of how they can do so:

- Providing informal occasions for teachers and parents to get to know one another as individuals and as partners in education.
- Making parents aware of school policies and programs.
- Helping parents understand the importance of their support of school rules and procedures.
- Educating parents in parenting skills and ways to support children's learning at home.
- Strengthening parent-teacher communication and understanding through newsletters, workshops, events and activities.
- Conducting volunteer programs in schools.
- Assisting parents through outreach programs and referrals to community resources.
- Encouraging parents and community members to unite to improve the lives of children and youth through programs that address social problems.
- Designating a teacher liaison to represent educators on your PTA/PTSA and act as a PTA/PTSA ambassador to all staff.

### Special Recognition

There are some special ways PTA/PTSAs can honor the commitment of key players in education such as special recognition weeks (i.e.: School Board Appreciation Week) and nominations for awards such as the Michigan PTSA Educator of the Year. Go to [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org) for more ideas! ☆

## PTA... The Bridge Builder!



PTA/PTSAs are **the** ideal groups to build bridges between schools and families. After all, the mission of PTA is to help every child reach their potential. Responsibility for children's success lies with families and schools. The nature of the responsibility varies, but everyone **can** contribute in a meaningful way.

There are a few simple things PTA/PTSAs can do to facilitate that meaningful engagement:

- Create shared understanding about the roles of key players in education by informing parents.
- Deliberately create relationships with the key players.
- Provide opportunities for meaningful interaction.

This edition of *Meeting Modules* presents common definitions of the roles of key players and offers some definitive actions your PTA/PTSA can take to make good things happen.

Remember, effective partnerships involve families, students, schools, and communities, and inform all stakeholders of how their efforts can create better programs and opportunities that lead to the success of students. ☆



## Share with us!

Does your PTA/PTSA have a special way to build those bridges? Have you created successful opportunities for parents and educators to interact? Let us know!

Michigan PTSA is looking for great examples of successful programs to share with other PTA/PTSA officers. Send a description of your meeting activity, discussion or project to 7402 Westshire Dr. Suite 115, Lansing, MI, 48917 or email us at [communications@michiganpta.org](mailto:communications@michiganpta.org) ☆

## The Principal and PTA President: A Crucial Link

The principal and PTA/PTSA 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. Discuss issues. Review plans for events. Keep each other informed.
- Work out problems or misunderstandings in a direct, honest way. Keep an open mind. Listen to each other.
- When working with parents and community, be positive and enthusiastic about your school.
- Develop a win-win attitude. Celebrate each other's accomplishments. ☆

## Supporting the Principal

A working partnership between the principal and parents, dedicated to the welfare of all children and youth, can strengthen family life and improve education for all children. The PTA/PTSA can provide parents a way to work together in partnership with the principal in the following ways:

- Encourage the principal to speak openly of his or her goals and concerns.
- Present PTA /PTSA concerns and issues to the principal. Develop a forum that allows for frank and open discussion.
- Focus on education and how to best benefit students.
- Work with the principal or site-based management team to set goals. Plan programs that will help achieve these goals.
- Be alert to staff and community talents and resources, and draw on them for the benefit of the entire school.
- Help the principal promote fair discipline for all children. Volunteer to help write a discipline code for the school if one does not exist.
- Work with the principal to develop annual school reports and budgets. PTA volunteers can speak in support of budgets and other issues to the school board and local government.
- Keep things seen or heard at the school confidential. Encourage every volunteer to honor the ethical considerations and legal responsibilities regarding the privacy of students and their records. ☆

## Supporting the Superintendent

By joining together the voices of parents, teachers and community members, the PTA becomes a powerful partner with the superintendent in working for quality education. Here are some steps for the PTA to follow:

- Become familiar with school policies and procedures.
- Understand and use administrative channels and chain of command.
- Know the different responsibilities and roles of the board, superintendent and principal.
- Set priorities and goals each year, and discuss these with the superintendent.
- Work towards positive resolution of issues that will benefit all students.
- Expect to be heard as key community leaders and consider scheduling regular opportunities for dialogue.
- Involve people who will participate actively on committees and task forces.
- Mobilize coalitions, when necessary, to achieve education goals or to support school issues.
- Be willing to openly discuss issues and options for the school district.
- Be sure to recognize the educational accomplishments of the school system, students and teachers as well as to address concerns. ☆

## Supporting the Board

In learning to work with your local school board, understand the difference between administration (superintendent and staff) and policy-making (school board). The PTA/PTSA can be a valuable partner to the school board by:

- Establishing regular two-way communication with the school board including extending invitations to PTA/PTSA sponsored events.
- Appointing a PTA/PTSA liaison to attend school board meetings and collect copies of agendas and reports.
- Keeping your membership informed of school board actions and policies by inviting board members to meetings, and through reports in newsletters, meetings and special programs.
- Deciding who speaks for the PTA/PTSA to your school board. When doing so, the spokesperson should avoid making personal observations and present only PTA/PTSA positions on issues.
- Hosting candidates' forums prior to every school board election. ☆

The School Savvy Parent Knows...

# Who Does What

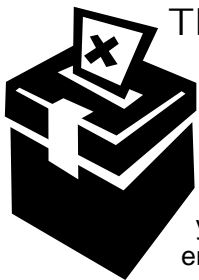


## The Superintendent

The superintendent, as CEO of the school district, is hired by the school board, receives general directions and outlines of goals and policies from the school board, and is charged with organizing the staff to meet these goals.

The superintendent's main role is one of leadership – leadership that helps the school board identify clear goals for schools, leadership that interprets policy guidelines to building principals and staff, and leadership that helps the community understand what the schools are and what they can become. It is with the superintendent's recommendation that the board determines the annual budget, sets education goals and approves the guidelines for relationships with all employee groups.

In communities where site-based management is in place, decision-making power and responsibilities may be allocated differently. In almost all areas, the superintendent's actions are guided by federal or state directives as well as school board policy. ☆



## Think School Elections Aren't Important?

Think again! Individuals elected to school board seats have tremendous impact on the quality of education your child will receive, and the environment in which it is delivered! ☆

## The Principal

The principal is hired by the superintendent to be the leader of the school. Their leadership provides purpose and direction for the school and school community which includes shaping school culture and values, developing a shared vision, and structuring change efforts.

The principal is responsible for:

- Carrying out school district, state, and federal laws and policies.
- Appropriately using budgetary allotments to the school.
- Supervising school staff and students to ensure the opportunity for quality education for all students.
- Providing instructional leadership for the school and nurturing a community of learners.
- Developing and implementing school goals and objectives with teachers, parents, community members and students.
- Working with parents, businesses and other community members to gain support for the school.
- Overseeing the management of the school's physical plant.
- Building an organizational structure which establishes and encourages shared decision making and continuous progress.
- Articulating the vision of the school. ☆

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## The School Board

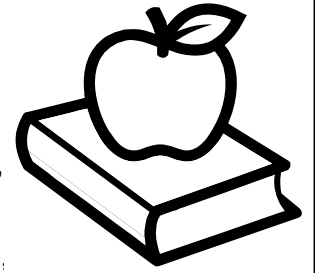
School boards consist of volunteers who are elected to ensure that the community's education needs are met. They are ultimately responsible for the activities and services of the schools as well as all policies that govern the operation of the school district.

In general, the school board's main functions are:

- Policy-making in all areas of school programs and functions and establishing the district's annual budget.
- Hiring and evaluating the superintendent, and approving selection procedures for other personnel.
- Overseeing the educational programs and business operations of the district.
- Long-range planning and goal setting for educational programs of the district.
- Approving curriculum in accordance with state law and state department of education regulations and local goals.
- Representing the public as the employer of school personnel in any collective bargaining process. ☆

## The Parent

**Parents are their child's first teacher.** Research demonstrates that a home environment that encourages learning is more important to student achievement than income, education level or cultural background. When parents are involved in their children's education at home, they do better in school. The family makes critical contributions to student achievement from preschool through high school. Three kinds of parental involvement at home are consistently associated with higher student achievement: actively organizing and monitoring a child's time, helping with homework and discussing school matters.



**Parents are crucial partners with the school.** When parents are involved in school, children go farther in school — and the schools they go to are better. Parents, school staff, and community members should understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise- and the results of that collaboration improve the success rate of students and the school. Student success is improved through increased student achievement, reduced absenteeism, and improved behavior. When parents and community members actively engage at the school, changes include upgraded school facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, higher quality learning programs for students, new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum and new funding for after-school programs and family support. ☆

## The Teacher

Teachers facilitate student learning and are, for the most part, in charge of the entire classroom experience. Students' background knowledge, environment, and skill sets are just a few examples of the many factors teachers have to take into consideration when determining how to help students attain their learning goals.

Basic activities of teachers include preparing lesson plans, lectures, exams and activities and mentoring students. Grading papers, holding parent-teacher conferences, attending school meetings and extracurricular events are also part of their routine. In addition to their traditional role, classroom educators often act as advisors to parents and students regarding educational and personal matters.

Teachers are on the front line when it comes to educating children and as such they are the crucial link in the partnership between school and parents. ☆

## Conflict Resolution 1-2-3

- 1 Address your concerns *directly* and *promptly* with the school personnel who was involved.
- 2 State your concerns calmly, without getting personal. Really listen to and consider the response. Look for solutions to avoid future misunderstanding.
- 3 Unable to come to an agreement? Request that the principal or the superintendent (whichever is closest in the chain of command) meet with both parties to seek a solution. ☆

## Essential Conversations

### Principal

- Read the student handbook and school policies; address any questions or concerns you have *before* there is a situation.
- Request a copy of the school's annual report card which provides information on annual yearly progress.
- Ask for a copy of the school's emergency plan; determine how you will be notified if such an event occurs.
- Book mark the school's website on your computer to ensure easy access to information.

### Teacher

- Share your child's strengths, talents and interests with teachers.
- Determine the best method and time for you and your child's teacher to stay in touch.
- Communicate your family's practices related to culture, values, and parenting.
- Notify teachers of any significant changes that have taken place in a child's life (such as death of a pet, family move, loss of income, family member's illness, or divorce).

### Superintendent

- Become informed about the major priorities your superintendent has established and what role parents and families can play in those.
- Review district policies and discuss your concerns with the superintendent.

### School Board

- Identify where and when the board meets and how you can find out about upcoming agendas.
- Ask school board members to tell you about their view of the greatest challenges the district faces and what families and parents can do to assist in overcoming them. ☆