

As we draw the academic year to a close and begin to look forward to a fresh start in the 2021-2022 school year, now is the time to deeply consider the ways in which you can make your PTA more accessible to the families you serve. Ask yourself these questions: does your PTA membership reflect the demographics of the students? Or the larger community? In what ways does the PTA connect with families who cannot volunteer in 'traditional' ways, or perhaps are non-English speakers? Does your board bring together a variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and identities? No matter where your answers land, there is always an opportunity for our organizations to become more equitable, inclusive, and accessible. Here are a few tips to get started!

Focus on Access and Communication First

How are you communicating with your families? Are you providing multiple means of communication? Are you providing it in the primary languages of your families? Do all families know what PTA is and how to contact the board if they want to get involved? Diversify your communication strategies – from print and email newsletters to social media or even signage at parent pick-up, consider the ways in which you may be missing out on connecting.

Are your meetings at a time that is accessible to most folks? Are you hosting virtual meetings to help those who can't get transportation to and from the school? Do you provide translation services or interpreters at your meetings? Try to engage in some perspective taking and walk through a 'typical' PTA meeting or event. What would the experience be like for someone who is a non-English speaker? Someone who is neurodivergent? In a wheelchair? Deaf? Consider the ways in which you can make changes (both small and big) to make your spaces more accessible.

Make a Personal Commitment

Sometimes in becoming more accessible and refocusing your PTA on being more inclusive, you'll find you have to become accountable to mistakes you've made, barriers you've unintentionally enforced, or biases you have held. This can be challenging but it is very important! Consider finding colleagues and partners to unpack, unlearn, and relearn in this work. It takes a conscious effort.

Make a Team Commitment

Whether you establish a committee or set specific targets around diversity, equity, and inclusion, make a commitment to improve in one or more areas and make steady strides towards those improvements. Report out on progress at each meeting and bring in folks to help you achieve your goals.

Get Feedback

While perspective taking can help you to understand how to improve, asking for feedback and making it easy to provide the feedback is even better. Rather than assuming how someone

might experience or perceive PTA, they can tell you directly! Coordinate with your school administration to promote engagement with a survey, hold virtual 'office hours,' or create focus groups. Always ensure your meetings allow for open forum and discussion. Once you've gotten the feedback, be sure you're integrating it into your decision making. No, you won't make *everyone* happy but making strides to honor a diversity of experiences and really hearing the feedback folks are willing to provide is critical!

Be Patient

Change takes time. Refocusing culture and breaking down norms doesn't happen overnight. Celebrate small successes but continue taking steps to move forward.

