

Name: **Mary Pat King**

What is your current role with PTA? **National PTA Director of Education & Leadership Development, PTA Member** (of many PTAs across country including National PTA Supporting Member) and Member/Volunteer (Cypress Woods Elementary PTA, Florida PTA)

What was your first PTA volunteer position? **My first volunteer position was Legislative & Advocacy Chair of my Local PTA**

What was the most challenging obstacle that you encountered on the path to your current role? **Focusing on what matters most instead of trying to do it all.**

How did you overcome this obstacle? **We listened.** We surveyed parents, teachers and students. We invited parents and teachers to an informal listening session at our President's house. Then we honed in on specific goals that we heard from our community regarding what mattered most to them in support of student success and school improvements. We built a plan and calendar that achieved the goals to include a fundraising objective that focused on a specific school improvement.

Describe your happiest moment as a PTA leader. **At the end of my 2-year term as PTA Vice President, we installed the next officers.** I remember I took their picture for our Facebook page and I was thinking – “Wow, I remember their beginning volunteer moments with our PTA — through our Garden Club, our Eaglethon, our Walk to School Day.” Fast forward two years to last week...I received the latest slate of officers via email and was so pleased to see a few new PTA leaders – my neighborhood friends who I remember hesitating as I encouraged them to get involved. Now they are slated to be officers and I know they will sustain all the progress and continue the momentum of our awesome PTA. That’s what I want for the kids of our community – a PTA focused on making progress and continuing the momentum.

What advice would you offer to a budding leader? **Listen to your community. Focus on what they think matters most.** Value volunteer time – including your own. Be with your family – your kids – for some part of every PTA event. When other parents see you enjoying time with your kids, they are more likely to give an hour or two themselves. Welcome all perspectives and value all contributions. Something might not happen the way you envisioned it to happen. Ask yourself, “Am I the only one with that vision?” Chances are – you are! Remember, a great leader aims for progress and momentum so that future leaders can sustain the efforts. Things will go wrong – it’s all good. Don’t beat yourself up! You’re giving your time for kids and inspiring others to do the same. That’s what PTA is all about! Even inside your own head, focus on what matters most – the kids.

What advice would you offer to a PTA leader seeking to attain your current position? At my children's elementary school, I'm a Past Officer, which means – I'm back to being a PTA volunteer who helps with events, contributes feedback when asked, and shows appreciation for all the current leadership does. I still have a few more years as a mom at this school so I'm enjoying seeing the volunteers we cultivated bloom into the PTA leaders we knew they could be. My advice to other past officers is: be helpful, be supportive, be encouraging, be grateful, and most importantly, be cool with change. You know best how much your new leaders are juggling. Your "next" PTA officers will never lead the way you led nor do what you did. You don't want them to. They are hearing different things from the community and school partner! Continuing momentum and making progress do not translate to straight lines on a chart when focusing on what matters most. It may look more like a zig zag. They need you in their corner supporting them. You can be their advocate to others when criticism looms – as it always does for any leader no matter the role or the organization. Maybe you are thinking that your predecessors didn't do that for you? Does it matter? You are different – you can do better.

And we need your time and energy in other ways at PTA. Shift your volunteering time to a PTSA, bring those leadership skills you've gained to PTA's efforts in your school district and state. You care about kids – so add your voice to Florida PTA's efforts and advocate for them. What issue matters most to you? School funding? School safety? Mental health services? Equity? Florida PTA is working on it all. We need your voice and your willingness to engage and empower other families to get involved.

Looking back to the beginning of your PTA leadership journey, if you were given the opportunity, is there anything that you would do differently, and if so please elaborate. I wouldn't volunteer at the Crazy Hair Booth during our Fall Festival on a 90-degree day. Brushing, braiding and twisting girls' hair after they spent hours running, bouncing and rock climbing is – sticky. I'm pretty sure I took the longest shower of my life after that event. Other than that, I think everything in my PTA leadership journey (so far) has been as it was meant to be -- even when things didn't go perfectly. The lessons learned from every obstacle makes the path smoother going forward.

What's next for you? Middle School PTSA! My son starts middle school and that means, we have a new school community to get to know. I will stay engaged in my PTSA because I want my children to see that you have to be involved to make your community as great as it can be. Especially in middle school, I want to be a parent that educators/administrators and other parents know. I am a big believer in "it

takes a village.” And one thing I know for sure on this parenting journey – we need our village every step of the way!

Which of the figures below best reflects your leadership path, Figure A or Figure B? Please feel free to explain. **Definitely B. I’m open to the curveballs of life and leadership. They always connect me to the most amazing people and important experiences.**



Figure A

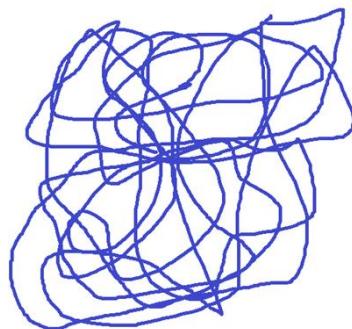


Figure B