

School of Excellence

There are two types of PTA folks: those who know what School of Excellence is, and those who don't. Okay, there are some others, but you see where I'm going here. No matter which group you fall into, unless you've gone through the School of Excellence process, you may not be familiar with all it has to offer, and how you can strut your PTA stuff with this National PTA designation! I'll let you in on a little secret, Florida PTA local units have led the nation over the last several years in School of Excellence designations. We need you to keep the streak going!

Let's start with the basics...What is the National PTA School of Excellence (SoE) program? Simply put, it is a program designed to recognize, support, and celebrate partnerships between PTA's and schools, to enrich the educational experience and overall well-being for all students. SoE is a year-long opportunity to connect PTA with the needs and priorities of your school's students, families, faculty, staff, and your community at large. When these groups come together for the benefit of our students, we all win. SoE gives you the tools you need to meet those needs through its wealth of resources.

That sounds awesome; how do we do this program at our school? Well, first, head on over to PTA.org for more in-depth information, and prepare to rally the troops. Make no mistake, SoE is a team sport, so feel free to get jerseys! Your school administration plays a critical role on your team, so take the time to meet with them and let them know what you're up to.

Once you have a team, you have to enroll. Guess what you can do RIGHT NOW? That's right, enrollment for the 2018-2019 school year is already open and runs through October 1st! It's the perfect time to harness the fresh energy of your shiny, new board members, and get a jump on the process. Even though you won't be able to truly start until the school year begins in August, enrolling now will give you access to all the resources that are available to help you on this journey. It's a fantastic opportunity to start a discussion among your board, and with your administration, about how the stakeholders in your school community work together, and where there are opportunities for improvement.

When September rolls around, it'll be time to deploy your baseline survey. Using questions provided by National PTA, you will ask your families how the school and the PTA are meeting their needs in a variety of engagement categories. You may find that your community sees things a lot differently than your board does. This is a good thing! It's a great way to take the temperature of your school family and use it to direct your efforts in the SoE program and beyond. You can deploy your survey on paper or electronically. Your Florida PTA Family & Community Engagement Committee is here to help with lots ideas to help you maximize your results. After all, the more responses you can get, the more valuable the data is. Once you have tallied the results, you'll send them off to National PTA, who will return to you a Roadmap to Excellence. This

customized document will kick off the most critical part of the program. The Roadmap is an action plan that uses the data you provide to identify areas in which your PTA and your school can improve its partnership and interaction with the school community. Your team will pick one area to focus on and spend the next several months implementing positive changes and programs to improve the engagement in your area of focus.

In the spring, you'll deploy the survey again. Those results combined with a narrative of your School of Excellence journey will be submitted to National PTA for review. In August, those schools that exhibit improvement will be honored as a National PTA School of Excellence, a designation that spans two years. The program is designed to allow the initiatives you implemented continue to improve and inspire your school community. In the second year of your designation, you can apply again, building on the momentum of your great work. This overlap allows your PTA to push for innovation and connection while continuing to meet the ever-evolving needs of your community.

Celebrating your excellence is a time to shine and sing your accomplishments from the rooftops! Break out the balloons and honor your community, and especially your SoE team, for their hard work and dedication to all students! All recipients of this honor are automatically placed into consideration for the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award and a \$2,000 grant for their schools. Named for National PTA co-founder, Phoebe Apperson Hearst, this award recognizes extraordinary achievement in the area of building effective family-school partnerships. It is the highest honor given by National PTA for family engagement. Florida has had a Hearst award winner in three of the last five years!

So, come on Florida, let's shine bright! We are the Sunshine State, after all! If your school is interested in becoming a National PTA School of Excellence and needs a helping hand, reach out to us at family.community@floridapta.org. We are here to support you!