

# Parents & PTA Partnering for Student Success

## Welcome to the Education Commission Overview

*LeAnn Wood, Utah PTA  
Education Commissioner*

Read below for some awesome tips and tricks for helping your child, working with educators and administrators, and learning how PTA can make a difference for students and for schools. If you'd like to learn from specialists like this – **Join the Education Commission.** We meet 3 times during the school year. Our next meeting will be in September 2018. I'd love to have more involvement from those who are interesting in making public education better in the State of Utah. Contact me at [leann@utahpta.org](mailto:leann@utahpta.org)

## Tips for Working with Your Child's Teacher

*Julie Anzelmo, Utah PTA  
Teacher Representative*

Teachers strive to cultivate partnerships with every child's parent or guardian so they may appropriately serve the educational needs of each child. Here are three recommendations for parental teacher interactions.

(1) When possible, attend informational events held at the school, such as back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences. At these meetings, the teacher will specifically tell you how she/he will communicate with families. You will have an opportunity to let the teacher clearly know your preferred method of contact, and to ask any questions. If you cannot attend these meetings, contact the school office to request the information be sent to you via email, mail, or sent home with your child.

(2) Make it a regular occurrence to talk with your child about what they are experiencing at school. What do they remember from the day? What do they like best about each day? What does your child say about the corrected work and projects they bring home? Address any concerns or questions you have about your child's classroom experience starting with the teacher. Parent and guardian input is helpful and valuable. Let the teacher know what steps you take at home to support learning, or ask for help to prepare a home action plan.

(3) If you have time and flexibility in your schedule, inquire about volunteer opportunities with the teacher or through the PTA. Increasing adult presence and participation in school

events and activities have been shown to improve student achievement.

## QUICK TIPS FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

*Sheryl Ellsworth, USBE  
Education Specialist*

Parents, placing all assumptions to the side, please remember teachers are wanting to do what's best for their students, your children. So how can you help? Research done by Scholastic Education shows that when families are engaged in their student's learning, families:

- Know what their child should know and be able to do at the end of the year.
- Know how well their child is doing.
- Take action at home to support what their child is learning in the classroom.

So, if you don't know, ask! Find ways that best meet your child's teacher's communication style (email, face to face meeting, phone call, etc.) and ask. Because, Family Engagement is any way that a child's adult caretaker (biological parents, foster parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.) effectively supports learning and healthy development at home, at school, and in the community. [Karen Mapp, Harvard GSE].

## A Superintendent's Thoughts on Helping Parents Resolve School Concerns

*Martin Bates, Utah PTA Administrator Representative*

Some time ago a neighbor approached me and was concerned with his son's schedule. Apparently, the high school his son attended had not given him a complete schedule on the first day of school. Quite frankly, the parent was more concerned about this than his son was. In any event, I was most surprised when he ended his concern with the following question: "So would the best way to get action be to call the Governor's office?" I looked at him closely to see if he was joking. He was dead serious. So I asked a question back: "Have you spoken with his counselor?" The answer was no.

Now, I don't mean to poke fun at my neighbor, many people really do not know how the educational organizational structure works. So, whether you have students in the local neighborhood school, a charter school or even a private school, let me make the two following observations: 1) Almost every organization has a hierarchy and 2) problems are best solved by the one who will actually solve the problem.

To the first observation, whether in business, government or schools, just

about everyone reports to someone. When I was in the Army we called it the chain-of-command. Every counselor (or teacher) has a principal and every principal has a supervisor as well. The most important first step is to find out who is responsible for solving the issue at hand. In my story, counselors usually are the ones to build a



student's schedule. That is person number one – and the place to start. If satisfaction isn't found there, then go up a step. If satisfaction isn't found there, go further.

To the second observation, while the governor has all kinds of authority, the governor, simply as a practical matter, does not have the ability to add a class to a student's schedule. In the State of Utah, it's even an open question whether the governor could direct that a class be added to a schedule. So it is important to find out who has the actual practical and legal ability to resolve the problem – and start there. You'll note that these observations lead to the same place; in my story, start with the counselor!

As a superintendent, I hear from great people who have concerns. Their concerns are real and important enough to them that they seek to bring my attention to the matter. While most superintendents know how to add a class to a schedule, they don't have all of the information (periods courses are taught, class loads, etc.) in front of them. When someone contacts a superintendent, the superintendent will most likely identify the person with the practical and legal ability to look into and resolve the concern and will forward the issue to that person, usually the principal. This doesn't mean that the superintendent isn't interested in dealing with something directly, but rather that the expertise resides elsewhere; in my story, the computer on the superintendent's desk probably doesn't have the software to add or drop a class from a schedule, but the principal can make that happen.

In conclusion, I really like interfacing with people personally. When resolving issues or concerns, however, I find it helpful to have things in writing. Then I know what the person really thinks the concern is and I have a record of where and to whom it was forwarded for resolution. If you know someone with a concern, encourage them to meet with the person where

*(Superintendent, continued)*

the concern originates and move up the chain-of-command from there. If it isn't clear where the concern originates, by all means, start with the principal either in person or by email (with a copy to the superintendent if you'd like). I can say with some surety that this formula will resolve the absolute vast majority of issues.

Whether you're a parent, a PTA member or both, I sincerely thank you for having kids in the front of your mind. Schools are your partners in this great endeavor of education, and we can work together for everyone's success!

## **Laying a Foundation for your Successful Student**

*Tammy Goodwater, USBE Early Childhood Specialist*

Laying a solid foundation for your child will help them become successful students and productive citizens. Here are some tips for building a strong foundation for your child.

### **Talk with your child**

Talking with your child is one of the most important things you can do to build your child's literacy skills. When we talk *with* a child, we are engaging in a conversation with them by asking questions, expanding their vocabulary, modeling correct grammar and pronunciation, and teaching

the rules of polite and respectful conversation. We are also listening carefully to what they are saying and responding appropriately (Remember, even though what they are saying may not seem like a big deal to you, it is to them).

For example, during a trip to the store, talk to your child about what's on your list. What shape or color are the things you need? What letter does it start with? Be descriptive. (for example, *"I need to find a pumpkin in the produce department. Do you know what color a pumpkin is? What shape is it? We usually make pumpkins into pumpkin pie. Do you like pumpkin pie? I like how pumpkin pie tastes. It's sweet with lots of yummy spices in it."*)

### **Nurture your child**

No one will ever be more of a cheerleader in your child's life than you! Most children need affection and it's important that they feel connected to you. They want to know that they matter. Tell them you love them often. Tell them what you love about them and let them hear you telling others why they are so great.

Take some time to slow down and spend *quality* time with your child. Listen when they tell you things, try their suggestions, or do something with them that they like to do. Recognize the symptoms of behavior triggers such as hunger, frustration, or sleepiness. Knowing the early signs can help prevent a

meltdown. Meltdowns are a secondary reaction. You can avoid a meltdown by making sure that their needs are met or, if they are getting frustrated about something they want but can't have, calmly redirecting them to another choice that they can have (for example, *"I can't let you cross the street without holding my hand, but would you like to skip or tiptoe?"*)

### **Give your child the opportunity to learn how to be a good student and friend**

Besides coming to school ready to learn, teachers also say that children who know how to be good students is just as important. When your child goes to school, it's important that s/he knows how to sit through a story, share, take turns, keep their hands to themselves, and use good manners. Be a partner with your child's teacher. Reinforce appropriate school behavior and discuss and provide consequences for inappropriate school behavior at home.

Making friends can be a complex process. Children need opportunities to explore social relationships with peers their age. It's important that those initial interactions are positive and supervised by caring adults. When your child



*(Foundation, Continued)* becomes engaged in conflict, you can step in and help him/her solve the problem, as needed. For example, your child is playing with a shovel when another child grabs it out of his/her hand. Your child looks to you for help. You can give your child the appropriate words to say. A two-year-old should be able to say, “My turn.”, while a four-year-old should be able to say, “I’m still using that shovel but here’s one you can have instead.” If your child’s words don’t work, you may need to step in and talk to the child or ask the other parent for help. By doing so, you are modeling how to solve problems. As your child gets older and begins to experience more complicated social problems, rather than telling them what to do, ask them what they think would solve the problem. Offer encouragement, suggestions and guidance. You may even want to role play the situation, so your child can practice what s/he will say or do.

Parenting is *a lot of work* in the early years of their life. There will be days that you don’t want to play hide and see *again*, or read their favorite book a tenth time but *doing it anyway* says something about you as a parent and assures them that they are an important part of your life. As they grow older, you will slowly step back and reap the benefits of your hard work as you watch your child become a successful and capable adult. As a parent

myself to two children who are now teenagers, I didn’t have a lot of time for myself in those early years, but it seems like those years flew by and there are days when I long for them to be little again.

## Utah PTA Support Benefits School Library Programs

*Fawn B. Morgan and Dr. Sharyl Smith, schoollibraryPALS: Parents Advocating for Libraries in Schools*

The school library program is critical to students’ academic and personal success. The necessary skills for college- and career-ready students include literacy in a wide range of digital, visual, and textual formats. Effective school library media programs enable students to develop critical thinking skills to access, evaluate, synthesize, and apply information; make informed decisions; build a knowledge

base; and value reading.” (Introduction, *Utah State Core Standards for Library Media, Grades K-5*)

Over the years, the Utah PTA continues to support school library programs on all grade levels in numerous ways, including: working as volunteers, serving on advisory boards, raising funds through various projects, and helping to manage book fairs that publicize school libraries while also benefiting school library budgets.

PTA members have supported these programs over the years and, more recently, promote somewhat formally by joining schoollibraryPALS: Parents Advocating for Libraries in Schools. This organization sponsors “School Library Books and Digital Resources,” a line item of the ongoing state education budget, as well as the proposed demonstration program/impact study, designed to improve school



(Photo Credit: Barnev Moss)

*(Libraries, Continued)*

libraries by including both certified teacher librarians and library assistants in school staffing.

Membership in school library PALS now numbers over 900. Advocacy of school libraries by this organization is furthered by the implementation of the PTA Resolution EDU 2010-1, "Teacher Librarians and School Library Media Programs."

The school library community recognizes the significant contributions of PTA's long-standing support.

## Helping Children with Reading Challenges

*Kathleen J. Brown, Director  
University of Utah Reading Clinic*

Dear PTA Readers:

I am Dr. Kathleen J. Brown, Director of the University of Utah Reading Clinic (UURC). We are so pleased to collaborate with Utah PTA to provide information to Utah parents and educators about reading challenges that children may face—and, most importantly—how parents can mitigate those challenges. In fact, the UURC was created in 1999 to provide "direct services" to these groups who care so much about helping children become successful readers.

So, moms, dads, grandparents, educators---here we go! Go to [www.uurc.org](http://www.uurc.org) and you will encounter our

fabulous website that contains tips galore and a plethora of free materials suitable for home and/or school use. From here, I'll guide you to some of the best we offer there.

**Assessment:** If you are concerned about your child's reading ability, you may wish to schedule an appointment for our Basic Assessment Battery. For a mere cost of \$50, we will administer several research-based reading and spelling assessments. After our crackerjack team staffs the results, we will send you a summary including our interpretations and recommendations. For more details about UURC assessment, please go to: <http://www.uurc.utah.edu/General/Assessment.php>.

At Home with Your Infant, Toddler, Preschooler, and Kindergartener: There is nothing more important than reading aloud to your child, from the time they can focus on a page (i.e., about 6 months of age or even less), all the way through elementary school. What should you read? What is the most effective way to read to them? For suggestions on this important topic, plus information about teaching the letter names and sounds in a fun, motivating way, please go to: <http://www.uurc.utah.edu/Parents/AtHome-Kindergarten.php>

At Home with Your Primary Grade Readers: These are critical years for building a

successful foundation for your child's reading ability. First, and most importantly, RESERVE AT LEAST 20 MINUTES OF DAILY READING TIME. That means no

"Reserve at least 20 minutes of daily reading time." (Brown)

social media, no video games, no TV. Next, and just as importantly, help your child choose a text that is appropriate for his/her reading ability. For help doing this, please go to:

<http://www.uurc.utah.edu/Parents/AtHome-Primary.php>

Here we have explicit, easy-to-follow suggestions for how to choose text and how to listen to your child read aloud to you without tears and arguments ensuing. Sound too good to be true? It's true. I promise! Thank You and Happy Reading!

## How does PTA impact the work that I do as a Male Engagement Specialist?

*Mike Edwards, Utah PTA Male Engagement Specialist*

The Utah PTA has a large impact on the lives of our children. The question is how to involve fathers and other male role models. I believe that we should focus on male involvement in the activities of

*(Male Engagement, Continued)*  
the PTA, as they affect children, in three ways:

Direct involvement in the classroom. When a father steps into the classroom, even as a playground aid, the dynamic changes, and children respond more positively to the male figure. In the current climate, with the presence of father figures being a rarity, the impact cannot be understated.

Direct involvement in the local school and school community. Take a child to the Book Fair and let a father be working, and the impact on that child's life cannot be underestimated. The importance of reading to the father is being conveyed to the child. Even if that father is there simply to maintain order in the line of children to get in, his presences speak volumes that words cannot convey.

Advocacy on behalf of school children and their families by being involved at the Council, Region, and State level PTA Organizations and activities. Male figures being a part of the process and awarding prizes, like Battle of the Bands, are moments of synchronicity where a father fits perfectly with the responsibility of organizing and running the Battle of the Bands. Again, an opportunity to have male figures involved in a program that enhances the experience for the student.

As the Male Engagement Specialist, I believe it is imperative to enable a

paradigm shift or altering of perspective. The PTA has spent years, decades even, fostering partnerships and alliances with schools, school districts, and Boards of Education. The framework is already in place, we don't need to build a program. What we need to do is convince the male figures in the student's life that their presence is exponentially more effective in the lives of their children at the school than almost anything else they do. And by emphasizing that it requires as little effort as one hour in a month to just be present, we can synergize their efforts with the ongoing PTA programs and have a long last positive impact in the lives of the children.

## How PTA can Benefit School Improvement

*Robert Palmer, USBE  
Education Specialist for  
School Improvement*

The National PTA states on its website that its mission "*is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.*" This mission statement, as well as the PTA values of Collaboration, Commitment, Diversity, Respect, and Accountability, will allow the PTA to actively engage in helping schools with each of these domains.

In **Domain 1:** Turnaround Leadership, Practice 1A is to *prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency.* The

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## The Center on School Turnaround has developed **FOUR DOMAINS FOR RAPID SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

These Domains are:

Domain 1: Turnaround and Leadership

Domain 2: Talent Development

Domain 3: Instructional Transformation

Domain 4: Culture Shift

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PTA can assist schools in communicating the urgency of improvement in a clear and concise way with parents. The PTA value of Accountability is necessary to ensure the success of this practice.

The PTA will be a great asset in assisting with **Domain 2:** Talent Development, particularly Practice 2A: *Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent.* The efforts of the PTA to provide volunteers, resources and funds for teachers all help with the retention of quality teachers. As far as recruitment, the PTA is able to provide potential new hires with a positive perception of the school and community. The PTA value of Collaboration is at work under this practice.

**Domain 3:** Instructional Transformation, particularly Practice 3C: *Remove barriers and provide opportunities.* As

*(School Improvement, Continued)*

stakeholders in the school and the community, the PTA can ensure that schools are a safe place for every student. This practice falls directly under the PTA value of Respect.

Finally, each of the practices under **Domain 4: Culture Shift** will need the PTA's assistance to ensure success. Practice 4A: *Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning* will incorporate the PTA value of Collaboration. Practice 4B: *Solicit and act upon stakeholder input* is within the context of the PTA value of Accountability. Practice 4C: *Engage students and families in pursuing education goals* is a direct reflection of the PTA's mission statement.

As you can see, the PTA plays a vital role in school turnaround and improvement efforts and USBE greatly appreciates the collaborative efforts with the PTA.

## How PTA can impact the work that you do with Special Needs Students and Their Families

*Karen Conder, Utah PTA Special Needs Specialist*

There are many ways that PTA can be a force for good in the lives of children with special needs and their families. Local PTAs should be encouraged to include the position of Special Needs Representative on their boards. The main focuses of this position are:

- Inclusion
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Awareness
- Resources

PTA can help these students and their families to be connected and more fully included and to enjoy the benefits of associating and participating with others in the school.

### 1. Inclusion

- Many students who are in special education (SPED) are attending schools that are not their neighborhood schools.
- The families may feel isolated because they are not from the area and they may feel

isolated because their children are in a different kind of class and maybe participate in different activities than the rest of the children in that grade do.

- Many students are bussed to the schools and parents don't get the opportunity to be in the school when dropping off and picking up students. They may not have friendships and connections with other parents in the school.
- Being part of PTA could help SPED parents connect with other parents and feel more a part of things.
- Sometimes other parents might even be afraid to approach these parents for fear of offending them.
- Invite parents of students in SPED to participate in PTA by filling a position or volunteering.
- Everyone wants to feel welcome and included. It's nice to be invited and informed whether they participate or not.

### 2. Communication

- Inform families about programs and activities going on at the school and help them know who to contact if they have questions
- Make sure families get the message or information they need in a way they can receive it
- Don't just assume everyone will hear about activities and know all the details
- Don't count on students verbally relaying the information and details
- Figure out the best way to communicate – email, paper fliers, phone calls, regular newsletters, webpage, Facebook, posters in the halls, etc.
- Get information to these families as **early** as possible
- SPED students **often need more time** than others to prepare for a change in schedule or a special activity and they **often end up being told at the last minute**
- Be careful with acronyms (Special Education is full of them)

Make sure to clarify acronyms. If you don't understand an acronym – **ask** for clarification

*(Special Needs, Continued)*

### **3. Flexibility**

- All special needs are not the same. Some are purely physical and others are cognitive or behavioral or a mixture. Some are temporary and others are long-lasting or permanent.
- What is appropriate for one person with a special need may not be appropriate for another. Different children may need different accommodations to fully participate.
- Focus on accommodations needed rather than on what the specific disabilities are.
- Work with SPED teachers and parents. Communicate with them. Keep them informed on activities. Include their feedback when planning activities.
- Be flexible – be willing to adapt and adjust programs and activities to accommodate children with special needs.

#### **Possible Adjustments**

- A buddy or extra help during field day
- Informed ahead of times about loud noises or surprise elements of an assembly
- Time at a carnival before the rest of the students come
- Let them know what will happen, what they will be expected to do, best place to sit during program, etc.
- **Support Special Ed Teachers and Aides**
  - Recognize and support special education teachers and don't forget their aides
  - They have extra work – IEPs, testing, reports, working closely with many classroom teachers, wide range of abilities and needs in the same class, etc.
  - Help them find needed volunteers and resources
  - Make sure they have people to help with parties and field trips or in the classroom, if needed

- Give them the same help (or more) that is given to regular ed classes

### **4. Awareness**

- Help others be more aware of those with disabilities and how to treat them and include them.
- Teach disability etiquette and People First Language

A person with a disability is still a person. The words we use reflect our attitudes and perceptions and can have a powerful effect on those around us. When speaking to or about those with disabilities, it's important to use People First Language (PFL).

People First Language focuses on the person rather than on the disability.

**USE** person with a disability,  
NOT disabled person

**USE** person who uses a wheelchair,  
NOT wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair

**USE** person with a physical disability, NOT cripple, quadriplegic, etc.

**USE** person with a learning disability, NOT learning disabled

**USE** person with a cognitive disability, NOT mentally retarded

### **5. Resources**

- Learn about resources available and help inform families, teachers and school personnel about them.
- Inform people about the new Utah PTA resolution "High Expectations for Students with Disabilities"
- Share information about the Special Artists Category of Reflections.
- Publicize information about the Utah Parent Center and their free services.

Utah PTA  
Special Needs Focus

- Inclusion
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Awareness
- Resources

## #AllinForKidsEd

### Utah PTA Social Media Campaign

What are you doing to support education in your circle? Let's celebrate the small successes. In the carpool line, working a second job, checking a backpack, attending a parent meeting, helping with homework, at a music concert - then you are #allinforkidsed. Snap a picture and let's share how we are supporting students around us. Use #allinforkidsed on Twitter or Facebook. Share information, articles, resources, and pictures on social media.

You can post pictures on the All in For Kids Ed Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/All-in-for-Kids-Ed-158383614919334/>

### Does Family Engagement Matter? The Truth and Half-Truths about Parent Involvement

<http://www.teachingforchange.org/does-family-engagement-matter>

### Parent Involvement In Education - What Really Matters Most?

<https://www.publicagenda.org/blogs/parent-involvement-in-education-what-really-matters-mos>

## Special Need Resources

Utah PTA website – <http://www.utahpta.org/>

Law Enforcement: CIT – Crisis Intervention Teams – <http://www.cit-utah.com>

Utah Parent Center – <http://www.utahparentcenter.org/>

USBE (Utah State Board of Education) Special Education Services

<https://www.schools.utah.gov/specialeducation>

National PTA Special Needs Toolkit

<http://www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3715&navItemNumber=3728>

Ideas to Support Children with Special Needs

<http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4275>

Day of Encouragement

Day of Pairing

Special Needs Task Force

People First Language – <https://www.disabilityisnatural.com/people-first-language.html>

Buddy Bench –

A simple idea to end loneliness and foster friendship on the playground

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2016/04/04/kids-dont-have-to-be-lonely-at-recess-anymore-thanks-to-this-boy-and-his-buddy-bench/?utm\\_term=.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2016/04/04/kids-dont-have-to-be-lonely-at-recess-anymore-thanks-to-this-boy-and-his-buddy-bench/?utm_term=.)