



PARTNERS POST

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Your Partners for Public Education Newsletter

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Parents who advocate 'make change happen'

When something needs to change for the better in our public schools, parents and guardians work in partnership with educators and support professionals to get it done. That is how Tara Purcell of the Pennsylvania PTA sees it.

"The minute you speak up for your child or another child, you have just started to be an advocate for them," Purcell said. "We help change the future and make it better for our children."

Partners for Public Education shares the PTA's view that when parents advocate, change happens. This issue of *Partners Post* looks at different ways for parents and guardians to get involved — and stay involved — in their children's school life.



Partner Spotlight: Giving parents a voice in public education



Tara Purcell first got involved with the PTA when her son was 5 years old. He is 24 today.

She stuck with it for nearly 20 years because she felt it was so important for parents and communities to have active partnerships with their public schools.

Purcell became the president of the Mt. Carmel Area PTA and later a regional vice president. Today she is serving her second term as the Legislative and Advocacy Chair for the Pennsylvania PTA, keeping the 50,000-member organization up-to-date on key state legislation.

"I like to make sure everyone knows that the laws are only there because we are the ones who put them there," said Purcell, who works as an administrative assistant and parent liaison for the Mt. Carmel Area School District.

Over the years, PTA members have made a big difference at the local, state, and national levels, Purcell noted. The accomplishments range from getting new textbooks into public schools to passing state legislation requiring educators in grades 6 through 12 to get suicide prevention training to pushing the Environmental Protection Agency to take action to improve the quality of indoor air in schools.

"Parents as advocates not only for their children but their schools is so important because they are the ones who will make change happen, whether it's serving on wellness committees, PTA boards, or as volunteers, which our schools are so in need of," Purcell said. "It takes everyone to raise a child today."

Make the most of parent-teacher conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are a great opportunity to get valuable insights into your children's strengths and the areas on which they need to work. Here are some questions you may want to ask during parent-teacher conferences — suggested by Pennsylvania school professionals:

- **How well is my child understanding the concepts taught in class? How can I support my child to help him/her be successful in school?**

— *Instructional coach, Association of Mifflin County Educators*

- **What kind of skills will my child learn this year and be required to master by the end of the year?**

— *School counselor, Beaver Falls Education Association*

- **What are some positives you see in my child? I'd like to share a positive with my child that came from you.**

— *English-as-a-second-language teacher, West Chester Education Association*

- **What are ways you challenge my child? What can I do to ensure that my child is getting the most out of his/her education?**

— *Elementary teacher, Erie City Education Association*

- **What are some resources that can be used at home to provide help for my child if he/she is struggling throughout the year?**

— *Sixth-grade math teacher, Grove City Area Education Association*

- **How does my child interact with his/her classmates?**

— *High school teacher, Laurel Highlands Education Association*

- **How do you, the teacher, prefer to be contacted? How much homework should the students expect to see on a regular basis?**

— *English teacher, Northampton Education Association*

- **Where can I find my child's assignments and curriculum online? What can I do as a parent to support my child at home?**

— *Middle school math teacher, Wilson Area Education Association*

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Partner Benefits Spotlight: Can you see me now?

Need a new pair of eyeglasses? Or is it time to order new contacts? With your **Partners Benefits**, you can save when you buy glasses or contacts online. Visit the **Partner Benefits** page to log in to the Access program website and go to "Vision" under the "Health & Beauty" category.

Talking about the PSSAs and Keystone Exams

During parent-teacher conferences, parents of elementary and middle-school students may want to discuss the Pennsylvania System of School Assessments (PSSAs), which changed last year to line up with the new PA Core academic standards. Consider asking what last year's results can tell you about your child's academic progress and whether you should be concerned.

Parents of high school students may have questions about the Keystone Exams in algebra, biology, and English literature. All Pennsylvania students must show proficiency on these end-of-course tests or complete a project-based assessment in order to graduate — unless a superintendent grants a waiver because of an extraordinary situation.

To learn more about the PSSAs or the Keystone Exams, go to www.partnersforpubliced.org and click on Resource Library.



About Partners for Public Education

Partners for Public Education is working to provide you with resources about public education in Pennsylvania because we are committed to the success of every child. It is brought to you by the *Pennsylvania State Education Association*, an organization made up of the dedicated employees in your Pennsylvania public schools.

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