



Issue Brief

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Model Partnerships:

Leveraging Resources and Capacity for PIRCs and PTAs

OVERVIEW

Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) provide statewide leadership, capacity-building, technical assistance, training and support in the implementation of effective parent involvement policies, programs, and activities to improve student academic achievement. PIRCs, which were established in 1995 and later authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA-NCLB), are funded through a competitive grant process administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement. Currently, there are sixty-two PIRCs across the nation, with at least one in each state. Recently, PIRCs have transitioned from providing direct services to using a quality framework that creates a statewide infrastructure for parental involvement and leadership.

Founded in 1897, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA®) is the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the nation, representing over five million members, including parents, students, educators, school administrators, and community leaders. With more than 25,000 local units, PTA flourishes in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and the Department of Defense schools in Europe and the Pacific.

Together, state PTAs and PIRCs form powerful partnerships that advocate for and advance effective family engagement policies and best practices in their states to raise student achievement. Following are highlights of model partnerships between state PTAs and PIRCs that provide statewide leadership on the implementation of the parental involvement provisions within ESEA-NCLB and execute innovative strategies for engaging all families in the education of children. These strategies have increased opportunities for parental involvement in many states.



ALABAMA – Piloting Family Outreach Initiatives in Title I Schools in Partnership with PTA

When the Alabama PIRC transitioned from a direct service provider to a statewide technical assistance and training provider, it was clear that partnering with a statewide entity would be critical to its success. The Alabama PTA—with local units and members across the state as well as the infrastructure, expertise, and resources built from the foundation of a 113-year-old organization—was an ideal partner. The Alabama PIRC invited the PTA and the Alabama State Education Agency (SEA) to collaborate on the development of the new PIRC grant proposal as well as activities to support each partner’s priorities.

Each partner derives significant benefits from the relationship. The PIRC grant provides budgetary support for the Alabama PTA’s annual convention as well as training on working with Title I families which enables the PTA to more effectively engage all families. The PIRC also provides training at the Alabama PTA’s Summer Leadership Training, which all PTA local unit officers attend, giving PIRCs the opportunity to expand their impact into communities across the state. Currently, a representative of the Alabama PTA serves as a member of the PIRC board of directors and a PIRC staff member serves as the Vice President of Programs on PTA’s board.

The partnership has also created opportunities for each of the three partners to increase family engagement efforts. Last year, the Alabama SEA asked the Alabama PIRC to pilot a family outreach project in four school districts with the goal of increasing enrollment and completion rates for the

Supplemental Educational Services (SES) program. The PIRC launched the initiative, targeting the Coosa, Elmore, Macon, and Mobile school districts. Through its school improvement funds, the Alabama SEA and LEAs funded five community-based organizations to provide outreach efforts in each of the four districts. Among the outreach partners was a local PTA unit, which was responsible for providing outreach to the Macon County school district. The PIRC used a curriculum developed by the Center for Innovation and Improvement to provide training on SES services and how to conduct family guidance meetings. For its part, the SEA meets directly with the school district and the outreach partner to collect and assess the data. The Alabama SEA plans to expand the program into eight districts, doubling the initiative’s reach.

Key Benefits of Partnership:

- PIRC’s access to PTA’s large volunteer base allows the PIRC staff of three to extend its reach into more communities across the state.
- PTA has a meaningful partnership with the SEA on Title I families and services, an area it had not explored previously.
- State PTA received funds to train and support local units’ outreach to families in Title I schools.
- The SEA, PIRC, and PTA accomplished the goal of engaging more families in Title I schools and connecting their children to the tutoring services authorized by federal law (SES).



ARIZONA – Statewide Action Teams Target Federal Stimulus Package Funds to Support Family Engagement

The Arizona PIRC collaborates with the Arizona PTA and SEA to host a number of family engagement activities, including a Statewide Summit on Family Engagement. Over 350 participants attended the last summit, including parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and state officials. Dr. Karen Mapp, a leading researcher at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, delivered a keynote address and led a breakout session on family engagement. The PIRC and PTA have also presented joint workshops at the State Title I conference. The Arizona PTA President sits on the PIRC board, and the PIRC Director serves as the Parent Involvement Chair on the PTA's Board of Directors.

The Arizona PIRC launched Family-Friendly Walkthroughs to create more welcoming environments for families in schools receiving Title I funding. During the walkthroughs, PIRC staff interview the principal, teachers, parents, and other staff and rate schools on the following areas: Welcoming Environment, Communication, Information Sharing, and Participation. The walkthroughs produce assessment data and recommendations for the school to engage families in their children's education. The PIRCs conduct follow-up assessments one year after the initial walkthrough. As a result of the success of the walkthroughs, the SEA is encouraging schools to incorporate recommendations and strategies from the assessment report into school improvement plans.

Most recently, the collaboration between the Arizona PIRC, PTA, and SEA has leveraged additional resources for more systemic family engagement. The organizations recently formalized their partnership to create a Statewide Action Team. The SEA allocated funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to support family engagement by targeting 180 schools in need of improvement. The schools are eligible for \$25,000 and training and technical assistance from the PIRC. Each school will develop an action team with a chair who will be trained on research-based models and best practices on family engagement. In addition, the SEA will provide funding for an additional PIRC Parent Educational Specialist, who will oversee the parent engagement training and technical assistance needs of these schools.

Key Benefits of Partnership:

- PIRC's formal collaboration with SEA creates new opportunities for the State PTA to partner on systemic initiatives promoting family engagement in education.
- PTA's statewide volunteer base allows PIRC to disseminate materials, including portable kiosks on family engagement, brochures on SES, Title I, and other valuable resources for parents.
- PTA receives in-kind services, such as translation services, from the Arizona PIRC that help them more effectively communicate and provide outreach to all families.
- PTA and PIRC cross-promote their organizations' missions and activities through various vehicles including conferences, websites, media, and a PIRC hosted monthly television show, Parents FYI.



INDIANA – PIRC and PTA Partner on Statewide Parent Leadership Academies

The Indiana PIRC and PTA have a long-standing partnership and are currently in their eighth year of hosting Parent Leadership Academies for ten schools from the northern, central, and southern regions of the state. The leadership academies train school teams of two school staff and three parent leaders in strategies that maximize parent and family engagement and communication in schools. The initiative is supported by six regional coordinators, with two placed in each of the three regions. Regional coordinators work with principals, teachers, school improvement teams, and local PTA units to support implementation efforts.

The Parent Leadership Academy runs over the course of the school year, with the first semester focused on analyzing school data, reviewing and developing school improvement plans, and developing an initiative based on PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. During the second semester, school teams convene to present their plans to the community and receive feedback and recommendations on the plans. The Indiana PTA leadership participates in the community review panels and also serves as regional coordinators and trainers. The Academy culminates in a celebration, and the teams have an opportunity to hear from national experts, including Dr. Karen Mapp of Harvard's Graduate School of Education.

The success of the Parent Leadership Academies spawned "Voices in Action," an initiative that targets Latino families for whom English is a new language. Voices in Action assists families in navigating the school system, increases family involvement in supporting students' study of core subject areas in each grade, and educates families on how federal, state, and local education laws affect their families and children. Families attend two workshops that last two and a half hours each. The initiative provides childcare, transportation, and dinner to maximize participation. Last year, five communities across the state implemented Voices in Action. Families participating in Voices in Action also signed up for "Three for Me," a PTA program designed to connect all families to their children's schools and provide resources to strengthen home-school-community partnerships.

The Indiana PIRC also focuses on early childhood programs and college readiness in middle and high schools. The early childhood initiative partners with "Parents as Teachers," an early education model built on the foundation of family engagement. The PIRC emphasizes in the ways in which PTA involvement can assist parents with their children's transition from early childhood into kindergarten and elementary school. The college readiness program trains 15 parent liaisons from Indianapolis Public Schools, a district that has experienced high dropout rates. Parent liaisons participate in five day-long trainings throughout the year, culminating in a graduation attended by the schools' principals, social workers, counselors, and parents. The parent liaisons are required to facilitate two workshops and conduct ten home visits each month to promote family engagement in middle and high schools.



Key Benefits of Partnership:

- PTA's presence in Indiana's schools allows the PIRC to reach more families and access resources developed by a premier national organization with expertise on family engagement in education.
- PTA members have access to the Parent Leadership Academies, and some PTA members who have graduated from the academy are now providing training and regional coordination.
- PIRC's initiatives targeting Latino families, early childhood programs, high schools, and middle schools provide opportunities for PTA to connect to more families and encourage PTA membership among diverse communities.

MARYLAND – Engaging Families who are Homeless or Involved in Child Welfare, Criminal Justice Systems

The Maryland PIRC and PTA have collaborated on a number of advocacy efforts to promote statewide leadership and capacity for family engagement in education. In 2005, a council composed of 125 parents, educators, parent advocacy groups, and community representatives presented 21 recommendations to the State Board of Education who unanimously voted to accept all of them. One of the recommendations was to establish a Superintendent's Family Involvement Council, which would implement all of the recommendations for the family engagement strategy. The State Superintendent of Schools chairs the 40-member council which includes the PIRC, local and state PTA presidents, SEA representatives, the Maryland State Teachers Association, academia, early childhood representatives, English Language Learner Coordinators, student members, state and local board of education members, community-based organizations, and business partners. The

Maryland PIRC and PTA actively participate on the Superintendent's Family Involvement Council and the Maryland Alliance for Family Involvement in Education to advance systemic reform in family engagement in education.

The partnership also focuses on the planning and implementation of PIRC sponsored regional *Parenting Matters* conferences on family engagement, which include the SEA Title I Coordinators, Family Involvement Coordinators, superintendents, educators, principals, community and faith-based organizations, students, business partners, and parents. Each of the twenty-four school districts in Maryland are assigned a Title I Coordinator and a Family Involvement Coordinator and the regional *Parenting Matters* conferences provide a forum for them and others to exchange best practices and strategies for engaging families and educators across the state. Four Regional Special Advisory Committees, which include local PTA leaders, direct and inform the planning for each regional conference. The Regional Special Advisory Committees represent the Eastern Shore, southern, north-central, and western part of the states.

Recently, the Maryland PIRC and PTA, in partnership with the SEA, have leveraged the regional meetings, various advisory committees, and other forums to increase outreach to families who are homeless or involved in the child welfare and criminal justice systems. For example, the PIRC has provided outreach to homeless shelters by inviting parents to the regional conferences and removing barriers for participation, such as transportation and childcare. The Maryland PTA leadership is also connected with the Maryland Foster Parent Association, and has aided in the development of trainings for educators working with foster parents and parents with children in the foster care system.



The Family Involvement Coordinator meetings, facilitated by the SEA have focused on how to engage these hardest-to-reach families, which has initiated other activities including Frederick County's outreach to incarcerated parents.

Key Benefits of Partnership:

- Joint advocacy efforts result in the establishment of a Superintendent's Family Involvement Council, staffed by the SEA and Chaired by the State Superintendent.
- PTAs, the SEA, and PIRC provide training and leadership for school districts on best practices and strategies in family engagement
- PIRC Regional meetings and *Parenting Matters* conferences as well as Family Involvement Coordinator meetings create opportunities for outreach to families who are homeless or involved in the child welfare and criminal justice systems. PTAs, the SEA, and PIRC collaborate to increase and support engagement from diverse families.

NEW YORK – PIRC and PTA Host Statewide Summit and Action Teams on Family Engagement

Every Person Influences Children (EPIC), one of New York's two PIRCs, partnered with the New York PTA during its third grant cycle in order to bolster its efforts to provide statewide leadership and capacity building around family engagement in education. In October 2008, EPIC, the New York State PTA, and the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County Families

and Communities Together with Schools (the other New York PIRC), convened the first of a series of New York State Family Engagement in Education Summits. The goal of the summits is to engage state and local public and private leaders to build momentum and systemic change for meaningful family engagement.

Prior to the summit, the State Board of Regents developed a policy statement on improving student achievement and school performance through parent and family partnerships. The Regents preside over the University and the New York State Education Department and are responsible for the general supervision of all educational activities within the state. The University of the State of New York is the nation's most comprehensive and unified educational system, comprised of all elementary, secondary, postsecondary educational institutions, libraries, museums, public broadcasting, and professions. The PIRC and PTA partnership identified the need to support the SEA's implementation plan, which operationalizes the policy into meaningful family engagement on the school level. These partners began planning for the summit to create systemic change in support of family engagement as a key strategy to closing the achievement gap.

The Chancellor served as the honorary chair of the summit, drawing in multiple stakeholders, including superintendents of districts with Title I funds, the New York School Board Association, the New York State United Teachers, PTA leaders, parent advocates, Title I parents, and other decision-makers. The summit also included keynote addresses and panels provided by National PTA leadership, the National Fatherhood Initiative, and leading



researchers, including Dr. Karen Mapp of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Dr. Heather Weiss of the Harvard Family Research Project.

One of the summit's goals was to raise awareness among state and local educational leaders about the research on family engagement as a fundamental strategy in closing the achievement gap. In addition, the partners sought to create an infrastructure to implement the Chancellor's parent involvement policy through the establishment of eight action teams, which were supported by staff liaisons from PTA and EPIC. Each action team was charged with addressing one of the following areas: professional development, family engagement quality indicators, family engagement assessment tools, cultural competence, engaging the business community, higher education and certification programs, engaging the social welfare and healthcare communities, and promoting partnerships with families of children with disabilities. The PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnership were featured as a tool for each action team. Each action team committed to meeting three to five times before the next summit to develop an implementation plan for its issue area. The next steps include creating guidelines for action teams that are based on research and best practices, convening another annual summit, launching a promotional video supported by PBS, developing an action team website and reporting system to the Board of Regents, and advocating for a Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Family Engagement and funding and legislation to support family engagement in education.

Key Benefits of Partnership:

- New York State PTA, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and EPIC positioned themselves to be valuable partners to the State Board of Regents' implementation of its parent involvement policy and overarching student achievement plans.
- EPIC funded Title I parents to attend the National PTA's Emerging Minority Leaders conference, NYS PTA's first Emerging Minority Leaders Conference, and New York PTA's annual convention, where they received high quality training and networking opportunities to advocate for family engagement in education.
- EPIC and PTA cross-promote the organizations' work through various media outlets, airing public service announcements through Think Bright, an educational channel, and disseminating messages and curriculum to 5 million readers of outlets represented by the New York Newspaper Publishers Association.
- PTA builds off of the research produced by EPIC and its university partners on family engagement programs to advocate for family engagement.

CONCLUSION

In 2006, through the establishment of a new strategic framework, the PIRCs underwent a significant shift from providing direct services to providing statewide leadership and capacity building for family engagement. The new strategic framework encouraged PIRCs to partner with other statewide parent advocacy groups and many PIRCs identified their state PTA as a critical partner in major program activities and initiatives. Partnerships between the PIRCs and PTA provide many mutual benefits: more opportunities to meaningfully partner with the SEA, increased statewide visibility, sharing and leveraging resources, and stronger outreach efforts that affect more families and communities.

Key Characteristics of Model PTA and PIRC Partnerships:

- **Governance**-State PTA leadership can serve on PIRC's governing board and PIRC leadership can serve as Chairs of Programs or Parent Involvement on State PTA's board.
- **Advocacy**-PIRCs and PTAs can collaborate on federal and state legislative and advocacy efforts to establish laws, advisory councils, and capacity to promote meaningful family engagement in education.
- **Media**-PIRCs and PTA can collaborate on opinion editorials, public service announcements, advertisements, television shows, and interviews.
- **Outreach/Membership**-PIRCs can leverage human resources by using State PTA's network of local units to disseminate information and resources. State PTAs can reach families in Title I schools, urban communities, and underserved or underrepresented communities, providing an opportunity to increase membership and participation in Emerging Minority Leaders conferences, and other PTA-led initiatives.
- **Leveraging Resources**-PTAs and PIRCs can share resources, materials, and services and cross-promote them at PTA and PIRC sponsored conferences, trainings, and other events. PTA and PIRC leaders can share responsibilities and support each other's efforts in developing materials and conducting trainings for parents and educators.
- **Parent Leadership**-PTA members can provide leadership by conducting trainings or serving on advisory boards, regional committees, and implementation teams to promote PIRC initiatives. Parents involved in PIRC's initiatives can receive training and networking opportunities at PTA sponsored events.



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