



## **A How-To Guide on Promoting Father Involvement**

### **The Importance of Father Involvement**

*"No true-hearted man will shirk his duty in this crusade for the children, a warfare as glorious, I think, as men ever waged on a field of battle."*

—Alice McLellan Birney, cofounder and first president of PTA,  
at PTA's third annual convention, February 1899

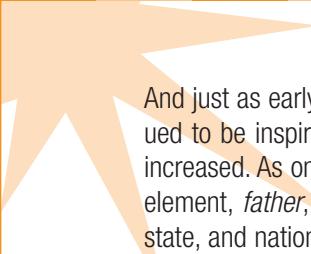
*"I want to make it clear that when I say 'the PTA,' I am speaking of the organization at its best....I am thinking of the PTA in its inclusive, organic form. I see it beginning with that all-important trio—a mother, a father, and a teacher."*

—B. K. Olmsted, past president of Delaware PTA,  
in "Men Speak Out for the PTA," *The PTA Magazine*,  
February 1970

Membership in PTA is open to anyone who is concerned about the education, health, and welfare of children and youth. When speaking of fathers and father involvement, we are referring to the involvement of not only biological fathers but stepfathers, adoptive fathers, foster fathers, grandfathers, uncles, older brothers, family friends, and other male role models. All men can offer valuable contributions to schools, PTAs, and children's lives.

ers, the organization formally strove to engage fathers more fully in their children's development even while still called the National Congress of Mothers.

Access this information online at  
[www.pta.org/dadsandschools](http://www.pta.org/dadsandschools).



And just as early, men responded to the call, working to further the PTA Mission in big and small ways. Later leaders continued to be inspired by the notion of the sturdy three-legged stool, and male involvement and leadership in the organization increased. As one 1970 article in the PTA national magazine explained, “Through the PTA a good deal more of that essential element, *father*, has been put to work to produce improvements in homes, schools, and neighborhoods and in community, state, and national services for children and youth.”

Today, there is documented evidence of what our founders knew instinctively: Children benefit from their fathers’ involvement in their schools.

Research by the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that this is true even when a child’s mother is already involved in the school. A father’s involvement “exerts a distinct and independent influence” on a child’s success in school.

What, then, are the benefits of father involvement? When fathers are involved in school, their children:

- \* Learn more.
- \* Perform better in school.
- \* Exhibit healthier behavior.
- \* Have fewer discipline problems.
- \* Are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities.
- \* Enjoy school more.\*

Tell fathers how important they are! And use the upcoming PTA Take Your Family to School Week, February 10–16, 2008, to re-emphasize our founders’ vision of having *all* parents—mothers and fathers—involved in children’s education.

PTA Take Your Family to School Week is celebrated the week leading up to PTA Founders Day, February 17, to honor our founders’ vision of building lasting family-school partnerships.

## Father Involvement Resources

- \* All Pro Dad, [www.allprodad.com](http://www.allprodad.com)
- \* Black Star Project, [www.blackstarproject.org](http://www.blackstarproject.org)
- \* National Center for Fathering, [www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com)
- \* National Fatherhood Initiative, [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)
- \* PTA, [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)
- \* Real Men Cook, [www.realmencook.com](http://www.realmencook.com)
- \* Three for Me, [www.three4me.com](http://www.three4me.com)
- \* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services fatherhood initiative, [www.fatherhood.hhs.gov](http://www.fatherhood.hhs.gov)

\* Sources:

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools*, NCES 98-091. By Christine Winquist Nord, DeeAnn Brimhall, and Jerry West. Washington DC: 1997. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/fathers/>

U.S. Department of Education. *A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning*. Prepared by the National Center for Fathering. Washington DC: 2000. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/calltocommit/>



## Sending the Right Signals to Fathers

Involving fathers in schools requires sending a clear message that fathers are welcome and valued. Unfortunately, PTA—and parent involvement in general—is frequently associated with just moms. Change this mindset by making a deliberate effort to reach out to and connect with men. Add to current communications messaging tailored specifically to fathers and father figures.

### **Educate dads on the importance of their involvement.**

Make parent involvement and PTA relevant to men by connecting it to their children's success in school and in life. Share with men the many benefits of family—and specifically father—involved involvement (see the previous page).

Plus, inform dads that their involvement in PTA:

- \* Shows added interest in their children's education and school activities.
- \* Shows greater support for their children's teachers and school.
- \* Improves relationships between parents and school personnel.

Most male PTA members say they joined PTA to work to improve their schools for the benefit of their children. Tell prospective members that they can do the same.

### **Emphasize that getting involved in PTA doesn't necessarily involve a large time commitment.**

Men may indicate that time is a barrier to their joining PTA. Let them know there are no volunteer requirements when joining, but that their membership *will* help maximize and support their involvement in their children's lives. As they discover the value of PTA and their involvement, men will be more likely to volunteer. Start with members to grow volunteers.

### **Design invitations specifically for dads.**

Don't rely on generic fliers and invitations to bring dads to school for PTA events. Increase father participation with special invitations that emphasize or illustrate those aspects of events that will most appeal to dads. For example, make invitations to a sporting event the shape of a football, baseball, or ticket. Catch fathers' attention! If your event is for the whole family, consider designing one invitation for moms and one for dads. In doing so, you signal to parents that it's important for both of them to attend.

The same principle applies for recruiting men to volunteer. Don't just put out a generic sign-up sheet. Issue dads a special call to action, and approach them with opportunities tailored to their interests and skills. Show fathers that you're attuned to them and that you sincerely want—and need—their to be involved.

Use the enclosed "Worker ID" template to collect information on dads' interests, skills, and availability. The reproducible template is also available online at [www.pta.org/dadsandschools](http://www.pta.org/dadsandschools).

### **Employ both male and female PTA recruiters.**

Dads tell us that moms can influence them to join PTA. Take advantage of that! Ask the women in your PTA to invite the men in their children's lives to join. Include a line for each parent on membership forms. Even offer special rates for having both parents sign up at once.

In addition, have men who are already part of PTA invite other men to join and volunteer. Ask PTA dads to invite other dads to specific activities—man-to-man. Get a few involved dads to organize a "dads club" within your PTA and recruit members to both the club and the PTA. Don't have moms start the dads club!



## **Seek men out in the community.**

Instead of waiting for men to come to your PTA, take your PTA to where men often meet. Present the PTA message at local service clubs that have a large male contingent, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, or Lions clubs. If men see that other club members support PTA's work, they may be more likely to join. Send information to houses of worship, community centers, and community groups to make a wider circle of men and women aware of your PTA, what you are doing, and why they should be members.

## **Publicize men's involvement in your PTA.**

Men don't want to be the only men at events, so make sure your communications advertise the fact that dads are involved in your activities. Talk about the great turnout of fathers and mothers at the most recent family fun night. Make sure dads are represented in the pictures you hang on school walls and post on the PTA website. Write an article about a father who took the lead on a recent project. Reinforcing men's contributions, while being mindful of what all members do for PTA, creates a positive atmosphere. Recognize members, thank them often, and celebrate your PTA's accomplishments and success!

Show dads how other men are getting involved—and how they can too. Hang the enclosed "Men Working" poster in a prominent place at your school. Then, create fliers advertising upcoming events in which dads (and other family members) can and should get involved—school functions, "dads only" events, family/community events being hosted by men, or family events in general. Attach the fliers to the bottom half of the poster. Consider laminating the poster to make it last, or attach a sheet protector so you can easily remove outdated information and slide in news of upcoming events.

## **Communicate with men more effectively.**

Men prefer to receive PTA communications in bulleted lists, as summary points, in e-mails, or as quick bits of information in newsletters. When reinforcing the importance of father involvement, do so in formats directed to dads: postcards, posters, or even letters from children that say how much the children value dads' involvement. In addition, provide quick tips on how dads can get involved in their children's education at home and at school.

## **Ask for their membership.**

Getting dads involved in PTA could be as simple as walking up to a dad and saying, "We'd love to have you join our PTA." Ask men to join and participate. It will pay big dividends in membership for your PTA!

### **Men and Meetings**

Men want fewer meetings, and they want the meetings PTAs do have to be at more convenient times, such as before or after work. In addition, men want meetings to have a clear agenda and be results-oriented, rather than exploratory sessions on an issue or topic. Here are a few more tips:

- \* Keep meetings on track, move them along at a good pace, and keep people on topic. Start and end on time.
- \* Have a printed agenda, and give a copy to each attendee. Try to send the agenda out ahead of time.
- \* Ask PTA board members to stand at the entrance and welcome parents to meetings.
- \* Have men invite other men to PTA meetings. Dads are more willing to attend with other men or if invited by other men.
- \* Remember that refreshments are nice, once in a while.
- \* Don't let meetings turn into social hour. Save the socializing for when business is done. That way, parents who can't stay won't be frustrated by missing the matters they came to discuss.



## Activities to Involve Fathers

Father involvement in school and PTA will vary with fathers' level of comfort, the other concerns and responsibilities competing for their attention, their interest in the activities and events, and the effort put into engaging them. Some fathers will be casual participants; others will volunteer for small roles; still others will be willing to take the lead on a project. Any level of involvement is valuable for children and the school. The important thing is that fathers *get involved*.

When you do seek to move fathers from participation to volunteering, though, there are a few things you can do to increase your chance of success:

1. Ask men what skills they would like to share with the school and PTA. Then utilize those skills in the roles you offer them. (To learn what skills men in your school community bring to the table, have them fill out the "Worker IDs" included with this guide [and available to download at [www.pta.org/dadsandschools](http://www.pta.org/dadsandschools)]. Do this at a PTA meeting, school sporting event, theater production, family night, or other function. Reach out to members and nonmembers alike. The Worker IDs could be another way to introduce men to the idea of joining PTA. Whenever a man joins your unit, make sure he fills out an ID.)
2. Give men specific jobs with specific time frames. Men tend to prefer short-term activities.
3. Clearly define volunteer roles and expectations. Tell men the what, when, where, why, and how of their assignments.
4. Reinforce for men the value of involvement. Give them a big-picture view of how their involvement contributes to children's academic success. Also tell them how their particular job contributes to the event's success.

Below are a few specific volunteer roles you may want to tap fathers to fill for your Take Your Family to School Week events. We've also put together some additional event ideas to use throughout the year to promote father involvement—perhaps as part of a dads club within your PTA. The event ideas are hands-on projects, family events, and activities that build relationships between father and child.

We are highlighting just a few volunteer and event ideas. Consider surveying fathers at your school to find out what types of opportunities they'd like to see. And be sure to invite dads and other father figures to participate—at whatever level—in *all* your family events, during Take Your Family to School Week and beyond. "Family" includes mothers *and* fathers—as well as a whole host of other concerned caregivers.

## Volunteer Opportunities for Take Your Family to School Week

### **Reading circles**

Invite fathers to share their love of reading through Take Your Family to School Week book discussions. Then, carry that involvement into the rest of the year. Ask fathers to help organize book fairs. Offer opportunities for them to read to classes. Create a program that encourages fathers to read with their children at home.

### **Career and job fair**

Recruit men to speak at your career fair, or in classes throughout the year. They can talk about their current professions and past jobs, the training and education needed for them, and career tracks in general. Also find opportunities for fathers to talk to children about hobbies.

### **Family fun festival**

Ask men to help with tickets, rides, games, and concessions at the festival. These clearly defined, short-term roles allow for problem-solving and public interaction.

### **Student talent showcase**

Put out a casting call for fathers who can help with programs, staging, set building, lighting, ushering, and other preparations for the student talent showcase and other art, musical, and theatrical productions.



## **Family-student-faculty sports event**

Get sports enthusiasts involved in recruiting, organizing, coaching, and playing on teams for your Take Your Family to School Week sports event. Whether you're playing kickball, softball, volleyball, basketball, or touch football, you'll need some knowledgeable referees too.

Take a close look at all the events you have planned for PTA Take Your Family to School Week. Do the invitations and the events themselves make it clear that you want dads to attend? What volunteer roles might men be interested in playing at those events?

## **Additional Event Ideas**

### **School beautification**

Involve "fix-it guys" with a landscaping, painting, refurbishing, or building project at the school. Engage them in improving their children's classrooms: making minor repairs, installing shelves, refinishing furniture, etc. The workers will see the results of their involvement, have a sense of accomplishment, and possibly save the school or PTA money.

### **Bike rodeo**

Bring in dads, the police department, and local bike shops to encourage bike safety, teach rules of the road, give bike tune-ups, and hold riding proficiency competitions.

### **Lunch buddies**

Even with hectic schedules, men can find time to participate in a lunch buddies program. The buddies meet with their children weekly or monthly, mentoring them over lunch. If it works better for the fathers, make it a breakfast buddies program—commonly organized as "Donuts for Dads."

Be considerate of work schedules. Many men are not available during school hours. Make sure you offer evening and weekend events.

### **Math and science showcase**

Work with teachers to plan hands-on math and science projects for parents to do with their children. Show families how much fun math and science can be, and give parents a chance to talk to their kids' teachers. Make sure moms and dads leave with information on how they can encourage learning and exploration at home, too.

### **Father-child field trip**

Take families out to a professional or college ballgame. Consider making it a special father-son or father-daughter outing. Check for special events and group discounts.

### **Grilling challenge**

Ask a dedicated group of dads to pull out their "World's Greatest <fill in the blank>" aprons and host a barbecue for the school community. The event will help fathers, families, and school staff get to know each other better, and could even involve a cook-off to see who makes the best barbecue. Add games and activities such as baseball, sack races, dunk tanks, and musical chairs.

### **Father-daughter dance**

Organize a father-daughter dance to help fathers bond with their daughters. Give dads and/or daughters a chance to select a theme for the dance.

Create a budget for some of your events so families don't always have to pay to participate. For more expensive activities, consider offering discounts or scholarships for families that otherwise might not be able to join in the fun.

### School derby

Have fathers work with their children to design, assemble, and paint derby racecars. Schedule a few workdays at the school when shop teachers, car experts, and college engineering students and/or professors will be on hand to give advice. The day of the race, make sure children and adults both have a chance to compete. Offer trophies for race winners, sleekest design, biggest comeback, etc.

### Academic and sports dinners

Invite fathers to attend and help organize end-of-season and end-of-year dinners for sports and academic teams and clubs. These dinners are valuable opportunities for dads to thank their children's coaches and mentors, and to tell their children they're proud of their achievements.

### Family nights

Family nights offer a way to get the whole family involved. Bring families together to watch a movie, play games, create a work of art, learn to cook, or experience another culture.

### Golf or mini-golf tournament

Have your dads club host a golf tournament to get other dads and men involved in the school. Put local service club members, community leaders, elected officials, school administrators, teachers, and students on the guest list. To allow younger kids to compete with their dads, make it a putt-putt tournament.

Asking people to join PTA is more successful when it's done face-to-face—particularly with men. One way to create opportunities for face-to-face asks is to set up a PTA membership table at PTA and school events. Draw people in by advertising a tie-in benefit for those who join PTA during the event. For example, give individuals who join during a PTA carnival two free tickets for carnival games. At school sporting events, offer coupons for free food at the concession stand, or discounts for the next week's game.



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