



The PTA Comunitario Approach

The Power of Family Leadership in Education...
with a Powerful Twist

The PTA Comunitario process is an innovation for parent organizations and for school-family-community collaborations. Yet it is probably very close to the intentions and actions of the founders of PTA over a hundred years ago. The roots are in *colonias* (unincorporated communities) in south Texas.

When families are treated with dignity and respect, they become the strongest long-term advocates for a quality public education for all children.

The PTA Comunitario model is grounded in IDRA's Family Leadership in Education process and decades of experience engaging parents and families in education and partnering with community-based organizations in South Texas working with poor families in distressed *colonias*.

Power of Family Leadership in Education



Community members come together



They partner with schools



Students excel

Meaningful family and community engagement is a critical element for strengthening schools.

IDRA has transformed the traditional PTA organizational model into a more effective vehicle for parents who have been previously excluded or underserved through a mutual school-home partnership in support of children's academic and social success.



Seven Elements of the PTA Comunitario Approach

#1

Comes from the Community Outside of the School

Community-based organizations sponsor and collaborate with schools to establish and maintain PTA Comunitarios. Collaboration includes co-planning, sharing in responsibilities for outreach and conducting ongoing activities to improve education in their neighborhood public schools.



#2

Family Leadership in Education

Family leadership in education takes the place of traditional parent volunteerism and fundraising. Family leaders in marginalized neighborhoods examine data on how their own children, and children across the region, are doing and partner with their schools to expand educational opportunity.



#3

Families' Home Language is the Language of the Meeting

Meetings and activities are conducted primarily in Spanish or other language of the participants. The meetings must be linguistically appropriate and culturally competent. Educational information is simplified and translated but not dumbed-down. Families are addressed as intelligent, capable and wanting the very best education for their children.



#4

Bare-Bones PTA Structure

The organization follows the essential elements of establishing a formal PTA, and it elects officers who hold monthly membership meetings and pay the required dues. Leaders are elected from the participating families regardless of formal education, class or language capabilities.



#5

Actionable Educational Data

Meetings include public school educational information and actionable data that leads to projects carried out by the membership. IDRA developed the bilingual (English-Spanish) [Our School data portal](#) that has served as a source for school transformation projects.



#6

Direct Peer Outreach and Family Connections

Volunteer leaders from the community serve and engage families in education as leaders and for collective action to improve schools, centered on a *promotoras*, or peer outreach and organizing model. Transportation services are provided or organized to assure attendance at events.



#7

Independent of – but Collaborative with – Schools

Connections are established with schools attended by the children of the members although the PTA Comunitario keeps an independent and separate identity.



Examples of Family Leadership in Education through PTA Comunitarios

In the spring of 2011, the superintendent of a large school district was the main guest at a dinner hosted by a PTA Comunitario that is nestled in some of the poorest unincorporated communities (*colonias*) in South Texas. The interactions and dialogue, all in Spanish, were about critical educational issues, including the district's cutting-edge work in dropout recovery and college preparation through a new college campus and the need for the schools to open to the community.



PTA Comunitario parents were the first 30 to post entries on IDRA's statewide crowdmap to report how state funding cuts have affected their schools. Most of the parents in this PTA Comunitario logged in at the community center because they don't have computers and Internet access at home.

After meeting with another superintendent and discussing the barriers they were facing in setting up visits with administrators on the campuses where their children attend school, the superintendent instructed the school principals to meet with the group.



PTA Comunitario parents hosted a meeting with about 80 youth in a backyard to involve them in what is one of the most important issues in Texas education: the school funding crisis. The group discussed the funding cuts, and the students shared their own stories of the impact of the cuts in their schools.

At a forum for school board candidates, one parent leader asked about their position on a new bill that reintroduced three tracks for high school graduation. The candidates pled ignorance of the new statute and promised to study up on the new tracking and graduation requirement policies. The parents were astounded to find that they knew more than the candidates about rules and regulations that had a critical impact on their children.

What participants say...

“We see each mother has potential.
We encourage each other to be a leader.”

“What all of our families have in common is a deep and fervent interest in our children’s future... Families, ARISE and IDRA, our ‘village,’ are making every effort to make sure our children get an excellent education in a safe environment.”

“If a group of parents can raise \$5,000 for this campus, OK. But if a group of parents can join together to make sure the math scores go up, this school will benefit much more,” he said. “They might not know how to do algebra but they know it’s important.”

Children's success in school...

These families who are so vibrantly engaged in the education of their children are encouraging them to be in the college preparation track and to take dual credit and AP courses. The parents are vigilant of what courses their children are taking and their grades. A significant number of the children from the first PTA Comunitario have gone on to college, some entering as sophomores because they've accumulated a year's worth of college credits while still in high school. Some are pursuing a master's degree while struggling to find the financial aid necessary, and others are teaching in the very schools they attended. These families are not yet English proficient and are working hard in low paying jobs, but their children are now on the road to become degreed professionals.

Learn More

- ▶ See IDRA's PTA Comunitario website: http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Family_Center/PTA%20Comunitario/
- ▶ Get resources at IDRA's Family Leadership in Education website: http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Family_Center/
- ▶ Listen to IDRA's Classnotes Podcast: <http://www.idra.org/Podcasts/>
- ▶ Sign up for IDRA news: http://www.idra.org/Receive_IDRA_News/



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