The national Congress of Parents and Teachers has as one of its main purposes the bringing "into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth" (Staff 1990). At the 1991 PTA Convention, the delegates ratified the following goal: "A comprehensive parent involvement program in every elementary and secondary school." With its history of activism and the renewed commitments to parent involvement expressed in the 1991 goal, the local PTA could well become a vehicle to promote the school as a community.

The local PTA and similar organizations have the advantages of:
(a) already being formed and active in nearly every school in the country;
(b) having the organizational structure of officers and committees to implement any purposes, goals, or activities;
(c) having secured the involvement of parents, teachers, administrators, and students; and
(d) sharing purposes and values which define it as a community already. With these advantages, the local PTA is well-positioned to make a contribution to the enhancement of community for the benefit of childrens’ education.

The local PTA could explore and implement the school-as-a-community philosophy by selecting programs and activities that meet local needs. Such programs might include those described in the Spring/Summer 1991 issue of the School Community Journal:

- **Parents in Partnership.** This program brings together more experienced parents and parents of incoming kindergarten students. One of the goals of the program is to effect the concept of school community through parental involvement by partnering all new families.
- **Megaskills Workshops.** These workshops are a school-to-home learning activity that supplement and extend the work of the school.

Each activity involves parents and children working together using materials found around the home.

- **Alliance for Achievement Model.** This is a management program used to form a school community based on values as defined by each local community.
- **Family Study Institute.** This is a school-based, parent education program which is peer-taught and which teaches parents how to help children study and read by fostering a positive learning experience in the home.
- **Effective Schools Institute.** The Institute assists schools in restructuring themselves. One of its missions is positive school-community relations. It has a training program.

While there are other projects and programs that can be used for topics, these five are established and accessible.

Obviously a great deal of planning is necessary in order for a local PTA to select and implement a program. Separate groups of parents will need to research each topic and then make the presentation on the assigned month. Representatives from program agencies or from schools that have hosted the programs could be invited to discuss their experiences and provide details.

Deciding which program or group of programs to implement could be accomplished by taking a poll of those attending the PTA meetings. Preceding the poll, a separate monthly meeting could be devoted to discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each program for that particular school district.

All PTA’s must be aware, however, that:

- Children need more than they are now receiving individually from their schools, their families, and their communities;
- The local PTA needs to be highly committed to the philosophy of community and recognize that training in establishing relationships is necessary;
- Academic success for children is linked to support from the home and the community;
- The community of the school involves the interaction of parents, teachers, children, administrators, and staff; any approach to improving schools must focus on these interactions and relationships;
- Planning common experiences and sharing are essential to any meaningful school community;
- The focus of attention in a school community is on the needs of children;
- Mutual support and sense of common cause are the hallmarks of a school community;
- The most enduring education occurs when people meet to reinforce each other in their task of helping their children learn;
- A community of school families can change the future of children for the better.
The PTA as a Promoter of School Community

This awareness should be motivation enough for PTAs to embark on such a far-reaching, rewarding, and exciting enterprise. The local PTA is a viable organizational vehicle for introducing activities and programs to build stronger school communities.

Reference:

Frank P. Belcastro is professor of psychology and education at the University of Dubuque. His interests are in the areas of behavior modification, gifted education, the school community, and holistic education.