

VIRTUAL SCHOOL CULTURE GUIDE

2021³



CREATED BY:

HCPS Customer Service Task Force

HCPS VIRTUAL SCHOOL CULTURE GUIDE



Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) is committed to providing superior customer service to our employees, students and their families, and community members. We recognize customer service must become part of a school's culture, which ultimately affects overall student success. Especially during times of 100% virtual instruction, or in a hybrid instruction model, it is critical to ensure our school communities feel engaged, welcomed, and in-the-know so they can best support their children at home.

Using the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Standards for Family-School Partnerships as the framework, the following Virtual School Culture Guide was created. This guide will focus on PTA Standards 1 and 2, which directly relate to customer service:

PTA Standard 1: *Welcoming All Families into the School Community:* Families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

PTA Standard 2: *Communicating Effectively:* Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

The intent is for this Virtual School Culture Guide to serve as a tool for HCPS Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) Liaisons and school-based staff to gauge, assess, and improve upon the welcoming environment of their schools with the goal of ensuring all families feel as though they belong.

#HCPSCUSTOMERSERVICE

01



PTA STANDARD ONE

Welcoming All Families into
the School Community



PTA STANDARD ONE

Welcoming All Families into the School Community



OFFER ENGAGEMENT EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES ONLINE

- HCPS leadership will encourage school administration to engage with parent organization leadership (PTA/PTSA or PTO/PTSO, if one exists) on a regular basis.
- Re-envision how to offer your school's traditional family events virtually
Consider virtual platforms, such as:

- Microsoft Teams

EXAMPLES

- William Paca/Old Post Road Elementary School
 - [Recorded Family Engagement event posted to social media](#)
- Havre de Grace Elementary School
 - [Parent Panel](#)
 - [Coffee and Tea Event Electronic Invitation](#)
- Be open to new opportunities to connect with families virtually during this time of distance learning
Some ideas include:
 - Show-and-tell
 - Book reports
 - Science presentations
 - Band/Cheer/Dance/Theatre practices
 - School dances
 - Spirit week daily challenges
- Encourage and support initiatives where students are interacting with each other. Students, especially who have transitioned to new schools over the past (and potentially upcoming) year don't necessarily have a peer-support system in place in the new school buildings.



Tip: Consider opportunities for parents/guardians to connect with one another as well.

- Continue sharing information about systemwide events and other resources offered by the HCPS Parent Academy.

02



PTA STANDARD TWO

Communicating Effectively



PTA STANDARD TWO

Communicating Effectively



WHEN AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE

Explore and implement different communication methods based on feedback collected from the parents/guardians in your school community.

- Determine how parents/guardians prefer to receive communications from the school.

Consider all methods, such as:

- a Blackboard Connect5 call and/or email
- a school newsletter



Tip: Sending a short survey to your community may help you to gather accurate data.

- Determine when parents/guardians prefer to receive communication from the school. For example, on a weekly basis, every Sunday.
- Determine what information parents/guardians are most in need of right now. Identify the best resources to provide your school's families.
- Encourage your teachers to use the same communication apps whenever possible and ensure it is easy for parents/guardians to monitor their children's school experience. Consider all available apps when choosing a universal option for your school, such as:
 - *Remind*
 - *Class Dojo*



Tip: Asking the teachers at your school to share their positive and negative experiences with various apps may help you to gather accurate data before making a decision on which app to move forward with.

EXAMPLES

- Havre de Grace Elementary School
 - [Parent Panel](#)
- Joppatowne Elementary School uses Class Dojo, buildingwide, and teachers use [this letter](#) to connect with all their students' parents/guardians at the beginning of the school year.
- Havre de Grace Elementary
 - [Communication Newsletters](#)

Continued on next page.

- Magnolia Middle School
 - [School Website](#)
- Patterson Mill Middle/High School
 - [Marquee](#)



BE ACCESSIBLE AND AVAILABLE VIA PHONE AND EMAIL

Explore and implement different communication methods based on feedback collected from the parents/guardians in your school community.

- Ensure families know how to reach school staff by phone if internet or computer access is limited. **Staff should also know how to access translation capabilities, if requested.**



Tip: Consider having a designated phone number and email address for parent/guardian questions and a staff member assigned to field these questions.

- Ensure your school's marquee message is current and provides a phone number or email for parents/guardians to utilize for immediate assistance.
- Make sure your school's website displays the phone number and email information so that parents/guardians can easily submit questions by email or phone.
- Regularly review your school's website to ensure information is current, streamlined, and easy-to-access.



Tip: Organize links to resources by grade level.

- School leaders and teachers could also consider hosting virtual office hours either by phone or online so that their staff, students, and families can reach out with questions, comments, or concerns.
- Remember to provide information on how families can connect with community resources, if/when available.

Consider all resources, such as:

- tools supporting job searches
- housing
- financial assistance
- food pantries
- medical services
- behavioral health needs



SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Explore and implement different communication methods based on feedback collected from the parents/guardians in your school community.

- Consider additional social media platforms that may be used to reach your families. The Office of Communications and Family Outreach has created [**Social Media Tip Sheets**](#) to assist you in establishing a successful social media presence.

Social media options include:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube

- If your school has an active social media presence, be mindful to keep your accounts up-to-date and post/share content regularly.



Tip: Remember, you can share content directly to your school's Facebook page from the [**HCPS Facebook**](#) and the [**HCPS Parent Academy Facebook**](#) pages.

- Use social media and teacher communication apps to ask families what they need most from you and your school right now.

SOURCES



- [**National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships**](#)
- [**A PRINCIPAL'S GUIDE TO LEADING IN THE TIME OF A PANDEMIC: Effective Family Engagement Strategies and Resources**](#)
- [**ENGAGING FAMILIES VIRTUALLY**](#)

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