National PTA, Harvard Family Research Project Release Issue Brief on Transforming Family Engagement through Data Systems

ALEXANDRIA, VA. (January 11, 2011)— Today, the National PTA® and Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) released an issue brief titled, Breaking New Ground: Data Systems Transform Family Engagement in Education, which provides a new look at family engagement and education reform through data sharing.

It’s no secret that parent involvement has a positive effect on a child’s educational success, but this brief describes how investments in student data systems are taking parent involvement and student achievement to a whole new level. In addition to addressing areas where a student most needs improvement, data can serve as a catalyst for home–school communication.

The U.S. Department of Education has identified building data systems to track student achievement as one of four critical areas of reform in which states must offer assurances of progress in an effort to secure federal Race to the Top dollars. The brief offers insight on effectively engaging parents in the process to effectively implement this top priority of education reform.

Parents benefit from having information about key indicators on which they can have an impact, like student attendance, growth in learning, and achievement. The information opens the door for meaningful conversations with teachers and students so that parents can make informed decisions and take action around performance, school climate, graduation rates, and other important issues that affect their child’s success.

The brief cites six case studies from across the country, showcasing innovative efforts of early childhood programs and school districts who are transforming what family engagement looks like by making student data available, accessible, and actionable to parents and families. The case studies show how effective development and use of data pathways catapults the essential role of family engagement as a catalyst for student achievement into this new era of transformation.

The brief also includes a set of policy recommendations to help support the current trends in education that focus on 21st century learning and the vital role of technology.

About National PTA
National PTA® comprises millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of parent involvement in schools. PTA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit association that prides itself on being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate
for public education. Membership in PTA is open to anyone who wants to be involved and make a
difference for the education, health, and welfare of children and youth.

**About Harvard Family Research Project**
Since 1983, Harvard Family Research Project has helped stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to
promote the well being of children, youth, families, and their communities. We work primarily within
three areas that support children’s learning and development—early childhood education, out-of-school
time programming, and family and community support in education. Underpinning all of our work is a
commitment to evaluation for strategic decision making, learning, and accountability. Building on our
knowledge that schools alone cannot meet the learning needs of our children, we also focus national
attention on complementary learning. Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach,
which integrates school and nonschool supports, can better ensure that all children have the skills they
need to succeed.