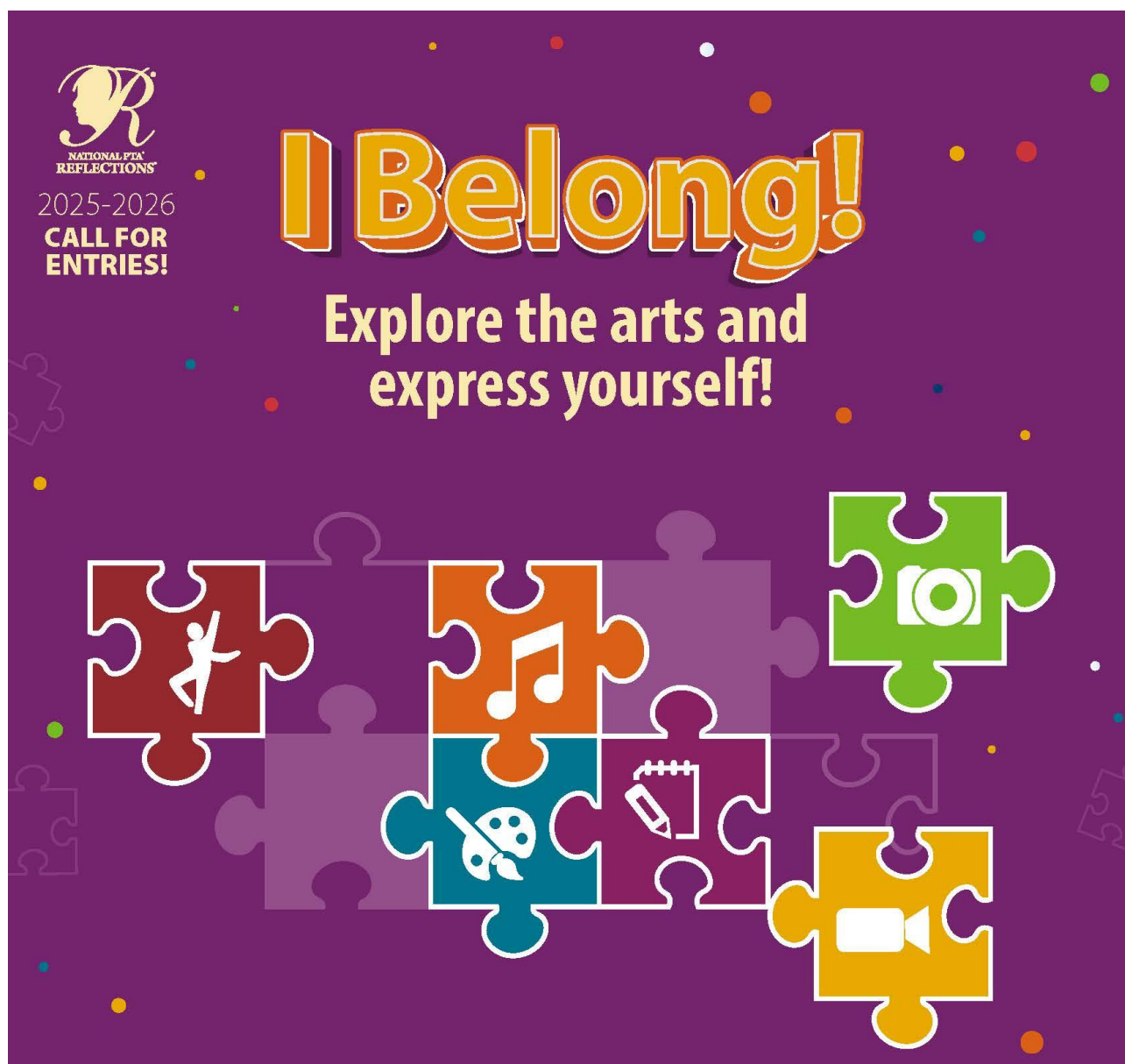


FSPTA Reflections Program

2025-2026



Guide for Local/Council Chairs

Dear Reflections Chairs,

Welcome to the **2025–2026** Free State PTA Reflections Program and thank you for volunteering to chair this wonderful arts enrichment program! Enclosed you will find many resources to help you run a successful Reflections program at your local school.

Please read all of the materials carefully.

We NEVER want to disqualify a student's entry because the instructions were unclear – read carefully and contact your Council PTA or FSPTA as appropriate if you have ANY questions.

Please note that local PTAs must be current on their dues, have submitted their officer roster to FSPTA, have up to date bylaws on the FSPTA template, and have paid Insurance. Locals are further encouraged to follow all the Standards of Affiliation for FSPTA to keep their PTA fiscally healthy.

Important Deadlines:

| | |
|--|--|
| Local Unit Search Contest for 2027-2028 Theme | Entries must be received by Free State PTA by 4:30PM on Friday, Nov 7, 2025 |
| Local Unit Artwork submissions in counties with an active PTA Council | Each PTA Council will set their own deadline. (Must be on or before Monday, January 5, 2026). My Council Deadline is _____ |
| Local Unit Artwork submissions in counties without an active PTA Council | Entries must be received by Free State PTA by 4:30 PM on Friday, January 2, 2026 |
| Council Artwork submissions to Free State PTA | Entries must be received by Free State PTA by 4:30 PM on Monday, January 26, 2026 |

This year's Reflections program for Free State PTA will be conducted virtually. Please note that National PTA has conducted this program electronically for some time. COVID prompted us to adopt this approach and for the foreseeable future we will continue on this path.

QUICK REFERENCE:

This year's theme is: **"I Belong!"**

Council winning entries must be **RECEIVED** by Free State PTA no later than **4:30 PM January 26, 2026**— **PLEASE CONTACT US IF THIS BECOMES AN UNDUE BURDEN!**

Local unit entries in counties with a PTA Council are due to your PTA Council no later than _____, (check with your Council and write in date). **No PTA Council may set their date due later than January 5, 2026!**

Local unit entries in counties without a PTA Council must be received by Free State PTA by 4:30 PM January 2, 2026.

Council Reflections chairs must ensure winning entries meet ALL REQUIREMENTS. Please be sure your winning entries have met all Free State PTA and National PTA requirements plus all program requirements, **BEFORE you submit the entries.** Entries must be disqualified if they are incomplete or if the Free State PTA and National PTA requirements are not met, for example, Local unit not in good standing.

Contacting Free State PTA: To start the Reflections program year, read all of the information provided for the most up to date rules, deadlines and submission guidance. Please contact the Free State PTA at reflections@fspta.org with any questions. As a Council chair it is important to provide the Free State Programs Chair with your contact information to ensure that you receive Reflections program updates and reminders.

Free State PTA asks that each Local and Council register on the National PTA website at <https://pta.org/home/programs/reflections> using the "Register Now" white box part way down the page, but Free State PTA strongly discourages any use of the Student Entry Portal by Locals or Councils to submit student entries to the next level of competition. Free State PTA will use the Student Entry Portal to submit Free State PTA winners to National competition ONLY. This is consistent with Free State PTA efforts in advocacy for the protection and safety of children's information. Unnecessary exposure of information electronically is a serious concern.

Format Rules for 2025-2026—

Dance Choreography and Film Production entries must be submitted in **MP4, MOV, or AVI format.**

Music Composition entries must be submitted in **MP3 or WAV format.**

Photography and Visual Arts entries must be submitted in **JPEG, JPG or PNG format.**

Literature and scores as required for Music Composition must be submitted in **PDF format.**

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Appendices (available at FSPTA website)

- Appendix 1 2025-2026 Reflections General Guidelines**
- Appendix 2 2025-2026 Reflections Student Interest Flyer**
- Appendix 3 2025-2026 Maryland Student Entry Form (.doc)**
- Appendix 4 2025-2026 Maryland Student Entry Form (.pdf)**
- Appendix 5 2025-2026 Rules Sheets for the Six Arts Areas**
- Appendix 6 2025-2026 Accessible Arts Division Rules**
- Appendix 7 2025-2026 Judging Information**
- Appendix 8 2025-2026 Local/Council Participation Form**
- Appendix 9 2025-2026 Local/Council Entrants List**
- Appendix 10 2025-2026 Theme Search Information**

1.National PTA Reflections

1.1 About the Reflections Program

The National PTA Reflections program is PTA’s cornerstone arts program. It was developed in 1969 by Colorado’s PTA President Mary Lou Anderson to encourage students to explore their talents and express themselves. Since then, the Reflections program has inspired millions of students to reflect on a specific theme and create original artwork. **Each year, students in Grades Pre-K – 12, are recognized for bringing the theme to life in the following six categories: dance choreography, film production, literature, musical composition, photography and visual arts (including 3D Art).**

Top entries from Free State PTA Reflections contest advance to National PTA for the final round of judging. National PTA awards are announced each May.

As a Local Leader of this program, you will play a critical role in promoting exploration of arts and culture in the home, school and community. Students who participate in the Reflections program may not recognize themselves as artists when they sign up—but by the end of the Reflections celebrations, they will.

I Belong!, the 2025-2026 Reflections program theme, was submitted by Ben Morgan from Lewis and Clark Middle School PTSA in Idaho through the National PTA Reflections Theme Search Contest (see section 1.3).

1.2 PTA Reflections and Family-School Partnerships

Research shows students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and pass their classes
- Attend school regularly and have better social skills
- Go on to post-secondary education

The National PTA Reflections program is a valuable tool for building stronger partnerships in your school community. Consider how you can apply the following PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships to your Reflections activities:

- **Standard 1 – Welcoming All Families Into the School Community.** Promote PTA Reflections to all families in the school. Emphasize that every child’s participation is valued and offer tips for how parents can support their children’s artistic expression.
- **Standard 2 – Communicating Effectively.** Share Reflections program information and reminders through a variety of channels, including your school or PTA website, newsletters, PTA meetings and more.
- **Standard 3 – Supporting Student Success.** Emphasize that PTA Reflections is designed to support students’ learning by enhancing quality arts education. Entries can be created in school, and the program can be used to support curriculum.

- **Standard 4 – Speaking Up for Every Child.** Use PTA Reflections to rally families to speak up for the value of arts education—to work with teachers, school administrators and legislators to keep the arts in your school, despite budget cuts.
- **Standard 5 – Sharing Power.** Give students a voice by encouraging them to enter the annual PTA Theme Search Contest. Invite parents and caregivers to volunteer with the PTA Reflections program and welcome their ideas.
- **Standard 6 – Collaborating with Community.** Seek community partners to support PTA Reflections with prizes and exhibit space.

1.3 Other Reflections Opportunities

National PTA Reflections sponsors a student-focused Theme Search Contest annually to determine a theme for two years later. The winner for the 2025-2026 school year will be selected in January 2026 and will receive \$100 from National PTA.

Free State PTAs deadline for 2025-2026 theme search contest submissions is November 7, 2025 (NO EXCEPTIONS!!!). For theme search student entry form and a list of past themes, see Appendix 10.

Mary Lou Anderson Reflections Arts Enhancement Grants: The National PTA Mary Lou Anderson Grant Program provides matching-dollar funding to local PTAs to support in-school and after-school arts enhancement programs in local communities. PTAs serving at-risk student populations are particularly encouraged to apply. **Applications will be available at <https://pta.org/Reflections> in January 2026.**

For more information, visit: <https://pta.org/Reflections>

1.4 Free State PTA Reflections Guidelines

The materials included in this packet are based on information provided by the National PTA Reflections group and are meant to provide the *general* rules applicable to PTAs throughout the nation. However, there are specific guidelines and rules which must be followed to meet Free State PTA Reflections program requirements:

- Local PTAs must meet four Free State PTA Standards of Affiliation to participate beyond your Local/Council level in the Reflections Program. Please contact your Council or Free State PTA with any questions or clarifications.
- In Maryland, students may only participate in the Reflections program through a PTA that is affiliated with their school and is in good standing. Students no longer/not attending a PTA school may not enter the Reflections program through their former/some other PTA school.
- In Maryland, home-schooled students may not participate in the Reflections program.
- Free State PTA is participating in the Accessible Arts part of the program. In addition to the grade/age bracketed entries, every PTA may also submit entries meeting the requirements for participation in the Accessible Arts division. See the Accessible Arts rules on the FSPTA website.

- Free State PTA will accept three (3) entries per age division per arts category for judging at the state level this year.
- Local PTAs in counties with an active PTA Council should contact their PTA Council to see how many entries will be accepted at the Council level.
- Local PTAs in counties without an active PTA Council may participate in the Reflections program, and, may send up to three (3) entries per age division per arts category to Free State PTA for judging. The entries for all the participating local units without an active PTA Council will be combined, according to age division and art category, and will be reviewed by judges arranged by the Free State PTA Reflections chairperson. The three (3) winning entries per age division per arts category will advance to the state competition for judging along with the winners from the counties with active PTA Councils.
- Free State PTA will honor its winners as determined by the Reflections Committee and the Free State PTA Board of Directors. Recognition for Outstanding Interpretation, Award of Excellence, and Award of Merit per arts category per age division will be awarded.
- Free State PTA will honor its Outstanding Interpretation winners at its 2026 Annual Free State Convention. Details will be sent to the winners at the address provided on their student entry forms. All Award of Excellence and Award of Merit winners will receive their awards in the mail or through their Council.

1.5 Free State PTA Standards of Affiliation

*Local Chairs - check with Free State PTA to make sure your PTA unit meets the four highlighted requirements before sending entries to the Council or Free State PTA for judging. Units not meeting the Standards of Affiliation by **January 26, 2026** will have any submitted Reflections entries disqualified at Free State PTA.*

- Adhere to the purposes and basic policies of the National PTA and Free State PTA.
- Have a minimum of ten (10) members.
- Remit the national and state dues to the Free State PTA by the dates designated.
- Remit by the required date the bonding, liability, and directors' and officers' insurance premiums to the carrier designated by Free State PTA.
- Submit the names and contact information, including the phone number and email, for all elected officers to Free State PTA within two (2) weeks of election or appointment.
- Submit a copy of the approved annual financial review to Free State PTA by October 31st of each year.
- Submit updated and approved bylaws for review by Free State PTA every three (3) years.
- Have an employer ID Number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on file with Free State PTA.
- File the appropriate tax forms with the IRS by the required date and submit a copy to the Free State PTA within thirty (30) days of filing.
- Maintain status as a corporation and have, as required by Maryland non-profit law, at a minimum a president, secretary and treasurer.
- File all appropriate Maryland state forms with the appropriate state authorities by the required dates and submit a copy to the Free State PTA within thirty (30) days of filing.
- President and Treasurer must attend annual financial training provided by Free State PTA or Council PTA.
- President and one other officer must attend annual Boardsmanship training provided by Free State PTA or Council PTA.

1.6 Free State PTA Reflections Requirements

National PTA uses an online submission system; this helps to alleviate the program's administrative burden, decreases submission errors, and improves tracking and reporting processes at National. All submissions from Free State PTA going to National PTA will use this system.

- Free State PTA asks that each Local and Council register on the National PTA website at <https://pta.org/home/programs/reflections/> using the box in the body of the page "Register Today!".
- All Local and Council PTAs shall **NOT** use the National PTA on-line student entry submission system. Free State PTA will use the on-line submission system only for student entries that go forward from Free State PTA to National competition.
- Use the Free State PTAs Reflections Guide to plan and implement the program. This guide includes the National PTA contest rules.

Follow the directions regarding sending artwork. The student entry forms must be sent with all entries advancing to the next round. Please check with your Council or Free State PTA for deadline information.

Ensure that all Local PTA winning entries reach the Council level (counties with a Council) or Free State PTA (counties without a Council) for judging by the Local Artwork submissions due date for your particular situation. Please check with your Council or Free State PTA for more details.

Be sure to Make/Keep Copies of Everything

It is imperative to keep electronic copies of the original Student Entry Forms and the artwork that is submitted to the next level of judging in the event there are questions.

Originality

All entries must be artwork inspired by the current year's theme and created expressly for the program. Artwork created and used for another competition or program may not be submitted.

Use of Copyrighted Materials and Plagiarism

Use of Copyrighted materials is prohibited in entries submitted to the Reflections program. The exception is the use of music in Film or Dance entries if that music is credited on the student entry form. Incidental use of copyrighted images in background of a film or photo is acceptable as long as the copyrighted image is not the focus of the entry. Questions about any specific entry can be sent to your Council chair or the Free State PTA Arts in Education/Reflections Chair.

Required Artist Statement/Required Title for Art Work

The statement must be at least 10 words ***but may not exceed 100 words***. The artwork is required to have a title ("Untitled" is not considered a title). The student and or the Reflections chair must fill out the sections of the Entry Form that pertain to the arts category in which the student is submitting an entry.

Guidelines for Display of Artwork

Free State PTA will follow National PTA's suggestion that when displaying artwork, only the following information about each piece will be displayed:

- *Title of Work
- *Artist's first name and last initial
- *City and state of school
- *Arts area and grade division

Local and Council PTAs may want to consider displaying only digital copies of photography and visual arts/3D entries. **Securing the safety of our students is always the top priority; similarly, consider the safety of the artwork itself when it is on display in any and all settings.**

See the Appendices to this document on the FSPTA website for rules sheets for all Arts Categories and the Accessible Arts Division. Please note that Free State PTA will continue to participate in the Accessible Arts Division. Also, in the appendices are the General Participation Rules, and the Free State PTA student entry form.

Theme Search Contest for 2025-2026 (See Section 1.3 – Additional Opportunities) forms are also in the appendices.

Good luck, and please contact your local PTA Council or Free State PTA with any questions!

2. Program Planning

Below are the steps needed to implement your program. As you read through this guide, make notes about specific tasks, who will be responsible for each task, and when tasks are due.

Your action plan may include the following steps for starting your Reflections program:

Step 1: Orient yourself to the Reflections program.

Step 2: Organize a team of volunteers. (Including judges)

Step 3: Promote the Reflections program to students, school personnel, and the community.

Step 4: Collect and organize artwork for judging.

Step 5: Begin judging process.

Step 6: Advance winning artwork to the next round of judging.

Step 7: Celebrate student participation and achievement.

Step 8: Wrap up.

To become oriented to the Reflections program, continue reading this guide and engage your PTA Reflections Network of National, State, Council and Local PTA Leaders.

We Are Here to Help You!

The Free State PTA Reflections State Chair is responsible for the overall implementation of the National PTA Reflections Program in Maryland. A key aspect of this role is to provide training to Local/Council PTAs on how to implement and promote the program in their communities.

Throughout the fall, Free State PTA and National PTA will host opportunities for you to connect with other PTA Reflections leaders. Your Reflections Network is a support system comprised of National, State, Council, and Local PTA Leaders eager to answer your questions and share best practices.

3. Organizing Your Team

As a Local PTA Reflections Chair, you will be responsible for overseeing the administration of the PTA Reflections program in your community. This is a big job... but *you are not expected to do it alone!* Your Free State PTA Reflections Chair and your Council Chair are here to help at every step of the process.

We also strongly recommend that you recruit a committee of volunteers to help. Volunteers will enrich the program by bringing a variety of ideas, talents and skills... and they will make your job much easier and more enjoyable by ensuring that program tasks don't fall on your shoulders alone.

When building your committee, keep the PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships in mind. Welcoming all families, communicating effectively, sharing power, and collaborating with the community are all strategies that will enhance your committee and help make your events a success.

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

As the Local PTA Reflections Chair, you will be responsible for the following tasks:

- Recruit Local PTA Reflections Committee members.
- Oversee the Local PTA Committee's planning and implementation of the Reflections program.
- Establish a program timeline.
- Communicate with other PTA leaders
- Represent your Local PTA at statewide arts-related events and collaborations.

Additional tasks for you and your committee include:

- Promote the Reflections theme search and program to local students, teachers, parents, and the community as a whole.
- Recruit other committee members, Reflections judges, and volunteers as needed.
- Distribute and answer questions about the rules, deadlines, and student entry forms.

- Collect student artwork.
- Coordinate the Local judging process.
- Host recognition activities for participants and winners.
- Register your Local PTA and prepare winning artwork for submission to the next round of judging.
- Return artwork to students as appropriate.
- Evaluate the process at the end of the year and make recommendations for improvements to the Local PTA Reflections Committee, your Council, Free State PTA, or National PTA.
- Collaborate with other Local PTA leaders to promote Reflections activities and arts advocacy messages through social media and traditional media (i.e., print/broadcast).

3.2 Tips for Recruiting Reflections Volunteers

You may find the following tips helpful when recruiting volunteers to help with your Local PTA Reflections Program:

- **Announce planning meetings widely**, rather than relying on the same small circle of volunteers. Ask the principal to suggest parents who might be interested in getting more involved, and have your board members extend a personal invitation. You might be surprised who steps up!
- Invite a representative of the student council or student government to participate on the planning team—or ask the **student council** to promote the program and host events, with PTA support.
- Consider recruiting **school staff** who have a natural interest in arts education for your committee. These might include choir or band directors or teachers of other art, music, media, technology, journalism, or creative writing classes. School administrative staff might be willing to help, too—for example, by collecting and organizing student entries.
- People who don't want to attend planning committee meetings might still be willing to **help with a specific role**. This might include promoting the program through social or traditional media, creating flyers and/or banners, or making phone calls to solicit community support.
- Community members such as **arts professionals or teachers** might be interested in participating as Reflections judges. See more about this in section 5 on “Collecting and Judging Student Entries.”

3.3 Recruiting Volunteer Judges

Inviting professionals in the arts and community leaders who serve as trustees, donors, and patrons of arts organizations to participate as Reflections judges increases the credibility of your program and exposure for PTA. All judges should have a working knowledge of their assigned arts area. Familiarity with student art is a plus and encourages age-appropriate considerations. Sources of judges might include:

- **Parents** who work as professionals in the arts or arts education.
- **School and community teachers** of music, art, dance, theatre, language arts, writing, graphic design, and media arts.
- **Working professionals in organizations or companies** such as museum directors and curators, symphony and choral directors, musicians, librarians, editors of newspapers, photographers, and local television personalities.

Always recognize judges in promotions and thank them for their participation. Some PTAs give each judge a small PTA gift or certificate of appreciation.

4. Promoting Reflections

One of your most important tasks is to promote the Reflections program to students and families, to encourage as many students as possible to participate. Taking time to promote the program to school personnel and the community, can help increase participation, enhance family engagement at the school, and garner additional support.

4.1 Program Messages

Below are some important messages to emphasize as you spread the word about the PTA Reflections program, especially through the media or to school and community partners:

- **All children deserve opportunities to explore and be involved in the arts.** The arts play a critical role in students' success in school and beyond, enhancing their reading and language skills, mathematics skills, thinking skills, social skills, motivation to learn and positive school environment.
- The National PTA Reflections program is **PTA's cornerstone arts program**. It offers students the opportunity to earn local, state, and even national recognition for original artwork they create in response to a specific theme.
 - Students who participate in the Reflections program get an **opportunity to explore the arts and culture, develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills, and recognize themselves as artists.**
 - This year's entries should reflect upon and interpret the theme: ***I Belong!***.
 - **Families can support their children's participation** by creating time and space for students to work on their entries, providing encouragement and needed materials, and volunteering to support the Reflections Program.
 - Entries should **represent students' unique creativity**—adults are welcome to encourage students but are asked not to assist in any way with their interpretation of the theme or artistic expression. Appropriate accommodation for Accessible Arts is allowed.

4.2 Student Recruitment Messages

Share the following sample messages with teachers and student leaders to promote the PTA Reflections program. You may find these messages work best within a school newspaper, during morning announcements, and at activity fairs promoting school clubs.

- *Who are you? Who inspires you? What makes you special? Choreograph a dance, produce a film, write a poem or story, compose a song, take a picture, or create a piece of visual art and tell us your interpretation of the theme: “I Belong!”.*
- *Discover your world and explore new cultures or your own through dance, film, literature, music, photography, or visual arts. No experience is required to participate in Reflections! Be recognized as an artist in your community. Choose the arts category you’re interested in and create an original piece of artwork based on the theme: “I Belong!”.*

4.3 Ideas for Promoting Reflections

Connecting with other Local Reflections Chairs can help build your support network. Locals with Councils can also contact your Council Reflections Chair.

By communicating about challenges and successes, Local Reflections Chairs can help one another with tasks such as identifying community judges, promoting the Reflections program in the community, locating affordable vendors, and finding additional sources for support.

To Students and Families:

Use a variety of channels to reach students and families. Consider creating promotional messages and materials in multiple languages, to reach all families in your school community. Some possibilities include:

- Host a **school wide assembly** to introduce the program. Feature examples of artwork from last year’s winners at the local, state and national levels.
- Include messages in students’ **morning announcements**.
- Hang **posters and flyers** in visible locations and send copies of flyers home to parents. You can find sample flyers on <https://pta.org/Reflections>. Send an interest flyer like the one in the appendices on the Free State PTA Reflections page.
- Post the deadline and reminders on signs near **student drop-off** and pickup locations.
- Post announcements and updates on the **school and/or PTA website** and via **social media** (e.g., Facebook, Twitter).
- Write an article about Reflections for a **PTA or school newsletter**. Showcase prior years’ winners and/or the benefits of arts education. Ask a student to write a similar article for the school newspaper.
- Appoint “**student ambassadors**” to talk positively about the program among peers. Willing students might be found in art or dance classes or clubs, school music programs (choir, band, orchestra), or creative writing or journalism classes.

Among Teachers and Administrators:

Invite arts teachers to serve as Reflections chairs, committee members or volunteers. The more involved they are in planning, the more likely they will be to serve as “champions” of the program among other faculty and staff, as well as to students and parents. Other ways to engage school staff:

- Request **time at a staff meeting** to present the Reflections program to teachers. Highlight the benefits of arts education and invite their ideas about how they might encourage their classes to participate.
- Provide suggestions for how this year’s theme might be **linked to curriculum**. Ask a teacher volunteer to create a sample lesson plan and share it with peers.
- Engage school staff in **planning the awards ceremony/celebration**. The school might be willing to hold a school-wide assembly or host a special lunch for participants and winners.

In the Community:

When reaching out to potential community partners, focus on the *impact* of the Reflections program on students, schools and families. For example, share how a local PTA showcases students’ artwork and brings families together to celebrate. Here are some ways your community can get involved:

- Invite community members to serve as **judges**.
- Reach out to nearby gathering places (neighborhood centers, barber/beauty shops, coffee houses) to **exhibit student artwork**.
- Local businesses might be willing to support **fundraisers for Reflections** (for example, a local restaurant might host a “dine out” night, with a portion of receipts benefitting the program). Proceeds might help pay for trophies, ribbons or certificates for student participants; food for the celebration; or a supplies scholarship for a student who might not otherwise be able to participate.
- Other businesses might provide **in-kind contributions**: ask a local arts-supply or craft store for donations of paintbrushes, paper, or paints; a local library or print shop might allow students to use their computers and photo-editing software for entries.
- Work with school officials to customize **media releases** to invite local coverage. Don’t forget smaller, local media outlets such as neighborhood association blogs and newsletters.
- **Community bulletin boards** can be good places to promote the program or announce student winners.

5. Collecting and Judging Student Entries

The process of judging student entries for the Reflections program includes providing program rules, collecting artwork, determining eligibility, and hosting judging.

The first step of this process is to determine a deadline for students to submit their work. Expect to need at least two weeks to facilitate the judging process and another two weeks to prepare winners’ artwork and complete the registration process so that winners may advance to the next round. Therefore, **set your Local PTA deadline approximately one month before submissions are due**

to the next round. Please see the upfront information in this document for Free State PTA specific dates and check with your local active County Council for their specific deadline.

5.1 Understanding Program Rules

All students must adhere to the General Student Participation Rules, as well as the rules for their specific arts category. Details of these rules are provided in the appendices.

Student Eligibility and Entry Guidelines

Students must participate in the National PTA Reflections program through a Local PTA/PTSA in good standing, as determined by Free State PTA. It is your Local PTA Reflections Committee's responsibility to confirm that your PTA is in good standing and to determine each student's eligibility. If you are not sure whether your PTA is in good standing, talk with your PTA President and Treasurer.

The following additional guidelines apply to student entries:

- Each entry must be the original work of one student only.
- A student may develop an entry inside or outside of the school.
- A student may submit entries in more than one arts area and/or multiple entries in a single arts area.
- Each student entry must be accompanied by a student entry form, signed by a parent or guardian. This form can be found in **the appendices to this document**.
- Student entries **MUST** include a title and an artist statement, which communicates the artist's inspiration for the work and how it relates to the theme. The statement must describe the content and be at least 10 words **but not exceed 100 words**.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may participate in the National PTA Reflections program in one of two ways.

Option 1: The Accessible Arts Division is an optional division of the Reflections program accepting students in all grades whose physical, cognitive or mental health challenges meet guidelines set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act. Qualifying students create their own artwork but may receive non-artistic accommodation and assistance from an adult. Students participating in the Accessible Arts Division for one entry must compete in the division for all entries submitted in that program year. Students will only be awarded in one division on the national level. National PTA will honor one Accessible Arts entry from across all arts categories to receive an Outstanding Interpretation Award. Up to five additional Accessible Arts entries will receive a National PTA Award of Excellence. Free State PTA will recognize Accessible Arts entries in the same way the age ranges are recognized – up to one Outstanding Interpretation, one Award of Excellence, and one Award of Merit for each arts area. Submissions recognized as Outstanding Interpretation will be forwarded to compete at the National level.

Option 2: Students who qualify for the Accessible Arts Division may choose instead to enter in one of the traditional four age divisions (primary, intermediate, middle or high school). In this case,

students follow all general rules and arts category rules but may submit their entries in the age division most closely aligned to their cognitive or functional abilities. These students are recognized and awarded as part of the general student population, without regard to special needs or challenges.

Originality

Specific rules related to originality for each arts category can be found in the appendices. In general:

- An adult may not alter the creative integrity of a student's work.
- Only one student may be recognized for each entry; collaboration with other students is not allowed. Other individuals may appear in or perform a student's work, but the work itself—the dance choreography, film production (i.e., screenplay, camera work and directing), or musical composition (i.e., written score and any lyrics)—must be the creative product of one student alone.
- The artwork must be inspired by the current year's theme and created expressly for the program. Artwork produced before the dissemination of theme or used for another competition or program may not be submitted.

Use of Copyrighted Materials

Use of copyrighted material is generally prohibited in the literature, music composition, photography, and visual arts/3D categories. This includes the use of copyrighted cartoon characters, copyrighted material from the Internet, advertisements or advertising ideas, musical themes from existing copyrighted compositions, copyrighted recorded music, copyrighted photographs, or stock images. Use of copyrighted music in dance choreography and film production entries is **acceptable when the title, composer, and performer of any music in the submission are cited on the student entry form.**

Film productions, photography, and visual art/3D may include public places, well-known products, trademarks, or other copyrighted material, as long as that copyrighted material is incidental to the subject matter of the piece and is a smaller element of the whole. Visual arts collages may include portions of existing copyrighted works, such as portions of photos, magazine clippings, internet images and type cut out of a newspaper, as long as those pieces of copyrighted works are used to create a completely new and different work of art. A collage should be judged for its whole—not its parts—and its creativity as an original work of art. Misuse of the above materials constitutes plagiarism—taking and using another's words, ideas, or inventions as one's own.

Special note for Free State PTA entrants: For all arts areas, submissions may not be created using artificial intelligence software (such as DALL-E rotor, hotpot AI, deep AI, Craiyon, nightcafe, or other text-to-art software tools) to generate any part of the content or composition. Content generation, including composition and arrangement, must be the result of student exercise of skills and tools. This does not preclude the use of image painting and editing software such as photoshop, gimp, paint or similar software tools for any of the arts area entries.

Addressing Student Ineligibility

Occasionally, entries submitted to the Reflections program are ineligible. One reason for ineligibility is that the Local PTA is not in good standing. It is very important that you check with your PTA President/Treasurer to ensure your PTA is in good standing with Free State PTA. Other common reasons for ineligibility are plagiarism and resubmission. The following recommended procedures apply to both plagiarized and resubmitted entries:

1. **Scan entries** to ensure that all are original and have not previously been submitted to Reflections or another art competition.
2. **Alert judges** to the possibility that some pieces may not be original and encourage them to communicate when one may be questionable.
3. **Check questionable entries** via Google or another search engine.
4. **Return ineligible pieces** to students; explain why they are being returned.
5. **Talk with appropriate school personnel**, such as school counselors, the principal, or teachers, about ways to address the seriousness of copying someone else's work or resubmitting artwork with the student and his/her family.
6. If ineligibility is confirmed after judging, **determine whether awards (including award money, pins, certificates, etc.) should be returned.**

5.2 Judging Process

The judging process has two goals:

1. To determine which student entries will advance to the next round of judging.
2. To award other prizes and recognition as determined by your Local Reflections Committee.

All PTA Reflections program entries should be judged on **artistic merit, creativity, mastery of the medium, and interpretation of the theme**. Mastery of the medium refers to the level of skill the student demonstrates in the basic principles and techniques of the arts area. However, a well-developed concept is more important than technique. Entries should be judged primarily on how well the student uses his or her artistic vision to portray the theme.

To facilitate the judging process, judges should receive the title and artist statement for each entry and the rules specific to their arts category. It is important to conduct *blind judging*—where judges do not see the artists' names—in situations where judges may know a student. Here are some tips for conducting blind judging:

- **Literature:** Distribute photocopies of *only* the front side of each literature entry. However, send the *original* manuscript of each winning entry on to the next level of judging.
- **Musical composition, dance choreography, and film production:** Prepare a file of all the entries for each arts area, as well as a list of the entries, using a code in place of the students' names.
- **Photography and visual arts/3D:** Cover the personal information attached to the artwork by folding the student entry form. If the student has signed the artwork, cover the signature for judging.

The following is a simple judging rubric your PTA may find helpful in evaluating entries and assigning awards. Notice that interpretation of the theme is weighted more heavily than the other considerations.

| Sample Judging Rubric | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------|
| Interpretation of Theme | How closely the piece relates to the theme, based on the artwork itself and the artist statement | 40 pts |
| Artistic Merit/ Creativity | How creative and original the piece is in its conception of the theme and its presentation | 30 pts |
| Mastery of Medium | The level of skill demonstrated in the basic principles/techniques of the arts area | 30 pts |

With this rubric, each entry may receive a total of no more than 100 points from each judge. Have judges record their points for each entry on a score card. Add the points from each judge and rank the artwork accordingly. **If two entries are tied, the entry with the higher score for interpretation of theme receives more recognition.**

6. Opportunity for State and National Recognition

Reflections provides your students with opportunity to share their artwork across the state and nation. National PTA Reflections is a multi-layered competition that has local, council, state and national levels of competition. We encourage all Local PTAs participating in Reflections to advance their student winners to the next round.

In Maryland, the National PTA on-line system is utilized only by the Free State PTA promoting entries to National competition.

6.1 Report Participation

After your judging process is complete, share participation information with your Council and Free State PTA. Complete the Local/Council Unit participation form (Appendix 8) and send it with the art that moves to the next round. Locals and Councils must also include a list of the entries being forwarded to Free State PTA (Appendix 9).

6.2 Advance Winning Entries to the Next Round

Local Reflections Chairs will select and notify their Local unit winners. Local winners will be forwarded to the Council (in counties with an active Council) or Free State PTA (in counties without an active Council) by the Local Unit Artwork submission deadline for your circumstance, listed in the front of this booklet.

Active Councils will select and notify Council winners. Council winners will be forwarded to Free State PTA by the Council Artwork submission deadline listed in the front of this booklet.

In all cases this includes:

- Properly prepared artwork of advancing students including entry form (see arts rules pages for details)
- A copy of the list of student entries per awards category that are advancing.
- A participation form (see Appendix 8) summarizing participation for your PTA/Council.
- Electronic media (thumb drive, CD, DVD) with a copy of all artwork being sent forward

Please contact the Free State PTA Reflections chair with any questions or concerns.

7. Celebrate! Recognize Student Participation and Achievement

Now it's time for you to be creative too! Follow your PTA and school traditions or add new ways to celebrate student participation in the arts. Recognition helps all students see themselves as artists, encourages family engagement, and provides opportunities to connect with the community.

7.1 Ideas for Recognizing Students Locally

The PTA Reflections program offers opportunities for PTA visibility throughout the year. There are many ways Local PTAs celebrate Reflections participants and winners. Examples include:

- Presentations at PTA and school board meetings
- School awards nights, banquets, or luncheons
- Announcements in the school newsletter or on the website
- Exhibits at community arts galleries or other public spaces (e.g., shopping malls, community centers, coffee shops)
- Features in local newspapers or television broadcasts
- Sharing photos, links, quotes, or anecdotes about the Reflections program or related events through social media channels such as Twitter or Facebook
- Invite the media to your celebration! Email the media in your hometown and follow-up with a phone call to encourage their presence or post-event coverage.

7.2 Regional and State-Level Recognition

Free State PTA award recipients are typically announced mid-March. All artwork will be returned that is not being forwarded to National PTA as a winner.

7.3 National PTA Recognition

National PTA award categories include the following:

- **Outstanding Interpretation Awards:** Seven Outstanding Interpretation Awards are given—one to the submission in each arts category, plus one in the Accessible Arts Division, that best interprets the theme. Each Outstanding Interpretation award replaces one of the Awards of Excellence described below. Winners at this level receive: A \$800 young artist scholarship, a gold medal, a certificate of outstanding interpretation, work featured in the virtual exhibition, and \$200 for their Local PTA.
- **Awards of Excellence:** These are given to the top three scores for each arts category in each age division. Winners at this level receive: A \$200 young artist scholarship, a silver medal, a certificate of excellence, and work featured in the virtual exhibition.
- **Awards of Merit:** These are given to the next five highest scores for each arts category in each age division. Winners at this level receive: A bronze medal, a certificate of merit, and work featured in the virtual exhibition.

National PTA award recipients are typically announced via news release and on <https://pta.org/> early in May. State PTA Presidents and State PTA Arts Chairs are notified via email. Each State PTA contacts the Council/Local Units of students who receive national recognition (except for the Outstanding Interpretation Award recipients—see below). Local Unit chairs notify winners.

The National PTA notifies Outstanding Interpretation Award recipients directly and coordinates their travel/participation to the National PTA Convention, where they are recognized. National PTA mails certificates to students who received Awards of Excellence and Awards of Merit following the National PTA Convention in the summer.

8. Wrapping Up

You're almost done! This chapter covers other important items including recognizing volunteers, returning artwork and sharing program information with your PTA President.

8.1 Recognize Partners and Volunteers

After your Reflections program concludes for the year, one of the most important tasks is to thank those who helped make it a success.

Be sure to include all of the following groups in your recognition plan:

- Students who entered, as well as any students who helped to promote or administer the program
- Family-member volunteers
- School personnel
- Judges
- Community partners that provided donations, such as prizes or exhibit space

8.2 Return Student Artwork

Return of Artwork is less of an issue in an all electronic environment. In the past, National PTA recommends that original photography and visual arts/3D pieces be returned to student artists as soon as possible after judging and/or recognition. Art works submitted electronically, including those in the dance choreography, film production, literature, and music composition categories, will not require return.

Non-advancing artwork can be returned immediately after judging or after your Local PTA celebration. National PTA recommends that artwork be returned by the end of the school-year. Please be sensitive to secondary students needing their artwork for college admission. If student artwork advances, it will be returned according to Free State and/or National policy (see below).

Free State PTA Policies

Free State PTA Outstanding Interpretation entries will be displayed at the 2026 Annual Free State PTA Convention. All other artwork will be given to the Councils (in counties with Councils) or

Locals (in counties without Councils) for return as necessary to the participants within the year following the submission to Free State PTA. Electronic submissions will not require return.

Free State PTA Reflections Awards Announcement and Entry Return Policy

Free State PTA will announce its winners during March 2026. If you want entries to be included in your Local Awards Celebration, please plan accordingly being sure to schedule your celebration after March 31, 2026. Free State PTA will make every effort to return all entries (as necessary) with the exception of Outstanding Interpretation Winners.

National PTA Policies

National PTA's award-winning entries are featured online at <https://pta.org/home/programs/reflections/awards>. Visual artworks and photographs are displayed throughout the National PTA headquarters, exhibited at National PTA special events and returned (non-electronic) within three years following their submission to National PTA.

8.3 Evaluate Your Program

Evaluation is a critical part of wrapping up your Reflections program. It is important to understand what worked and what didn't, so that you can plan for an even more successful program next year. Here are a few ideas:

- **Survey Reflections students, parents, school and PTA volunteers, and community partners.** Share quotes in a newsletter, blog or at your PTA and school meetings. With permission, use these quotes to further recognize student achievement on the school or PTA website or share them when seeking funding for your PTA.
- **Meet with your Reflections Committee** and other team members to review the program, gather feedback, and document successes and areas needing improvement. Sharing this information with next year's team will provide a smooth transition from one Reflections Chair to another.

Appendices
(Available on the FSPTA website under Reflections)

Appendix 1 2025-2026 Reflections General Guidelines

Appendix 2 2025-2026 Reflections Student Interest Flyer

Appendix 3 2025-2026 Maryland Student Entry Form (.doc)

Appendix 4 2025-2026 Maryland Student Entry Form (.pdf)

Appendix 5 2025-2026 Rules Sheets for the Six Arts Areas

Appendix 6 2025-2026 Accessible Arts Division Rules

Appendix 7 2025-2026 Judging Information

Appendix 8 2025-2026 Local/Council Participation Form

Appendix 9 2025-2026 Local/Council Entrants List

Appendix 10 2025-2026 Theme Search Information