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Veterans Memorial Middle School PTA Awarded Grant to Support Student Mental Health and Well-Being

Brick, NJ, August 3, 2026—Veterans Memorial Middle School PTA has been awarded a 2026-2027 Middle Ground Program Grant of \$3,500 from [National PTA](#) to support student mental health and well-being in their school community. Veterans Memorial Middle School PTA is one of only 20 local middle school PTAs nationwide selected to receive a grant. The funding is made possible in collaboration with the [New York Life Foundation](#) as part of National PTA's [Healthy Minds](#) initiative.

“Veterans Memorial Middle School PTA and PTAs across the country at all levels work hard every day to help students, families and schools navigate challenges and support their success,” said Dr. Bill Datema, president of National PTA. “We’re pleased to award Veterans Memorial Middle School PTA with a 2026-2027 Middle Ground Program Grant for their commitment to advancing strategies that make a real impact for students, families and the school. We are grateful to the New York Life Foundation for making the funding possible and for supporting the efforts of PTAs nationwide.”

National PTA and the New York Life Foundation collaborated to launch the [Middle Ground Program](#) Grant to support the creation of dedicated spaces in middle schools for students navigating grief and loss. Inspired by the New York Life Foundation’s graphic novel [Lost in the Middle](#), these spaces not only provide a welcoming physical environment but also opportunities for storytelling, creative expression and peer connection and reflect a commitment to fostering supportive, inclusive environments where students feel seen, heard and connected to ensure no child feels alone in their grief. In addition to the funding, grant recipients will also receive tools and resources to help their schools become *Grief-Sensitive Schools* through the New York Life Foundation’s [Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative](#).

With the grant, Veterans Memorial Middle School PTA will create **The Middle Ground**, a dedicated, calming space where students experiencing grief and loss can find comfort, connection and support during the school day. The space will feature comfortable seating, sensory and mindfulness tools, books and resources on grief and healing, journals, art and creative expression materials, memory activities, and other therapeutic resources designed to help students process their emotions in healthy ways. In partnership with school counselors and staff, The Middle Ground will provide a safe, welcoming environment where students know they are not alone and have access to meaningful support as they navigate life's most difficult moments.

"We are incredibly honored to be selected as one of only 20 middle school PTAs in the nation to receive this grant," said Kristen Stirtz, President of the Veterans Memorial Middle School PTA. "The Middle Ground represents hope, healing, and compassion for our students. Grief can affect every aspect of a child's life, including their ability to learn, connect with others, and feel supported. Thanks to National PTA and the New York Life Foundation, we will be able to create a space where students feel seen, heard, and cared for, a place that reminds them they never have to face grief alone."

For more information about the Middle Ground Program, visit PTA.org/TheMiddleGround. For more information about National PTA's Healthy Minds initiative, visit PTA.org/HealthyMinds.

About PTA

PTA® comprises millions of families, students, teachers, administrators and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement 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. For more information, visit PTA.org.