

THIS MONTH: BOARD ORIENTATION

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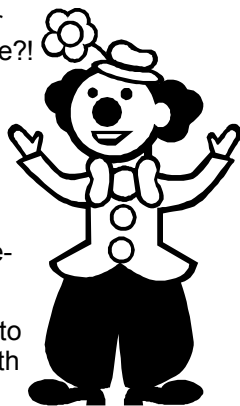
Don't Leave Fun to Chance!

Volunteers list "fun" as one of the top three reasons they participate. What does that mean to PTA/PTSAs that want to recruit quality officers and grow overall participation? It's time to get serious about having fun!

When planning agendas for your board orientation and all of your meetings, make time to make merry!

How? You could tap into the creativity of a few of your more crafty members or search for ideas on the internet. Below are a few ideas to start the silliness:

- Choose a theme and work in some good natured humor via a skit or role play (Sopranos PTA, anyone?! Join or you'll be swimmin' with the fishes!)
- Props a plenty! Silly sunglasses and clown noses can go a long way to reach shy new members and are sure to dispel any clique-like atmosphere.
- Recruit local talent! Kids LOVE to tell jokes, start your meetings with a student comedian and put the focus where it should be- on kids!



Fresh out of good ideas? Begin your meetings by singing the MPTSA song...it's sure to get a laugh! To get a copy of the lyrics, just send an email to communications@michiganpta.org ☆

What's the Big Deal About Board Orientation?

It May be the Secret to Your Success!

Board orientation is a **process** to thoughtfully provide board members with the precise information they need regarding their role in the association.

The purpose of board orientation is to:

- ❶ Provide important information about the association and about the board's **roles and responsibilities**.
- ❷ Build a working **relationship** among board members which promotes ongoing support and collaboration.
- ❸ Establish **operational norms** which the board will use to come to agreements and carry out their work.

When planning your board's orientation, it is important to ask the question: ***what do the members of the board need to know in order to do their job as best they can?*** No matter how well-qualified your new board members are, it will take some time to get them up-to-speed and feeling comfortable as members of your team.

A well planned board orientation is the key to moving this process along. If possible, you should conduct an orientation session of the entire board shortly after the election or at least in advance of the first board meeting.

Build in time on your agenda for fun and teambuilding. Design an activity or two that will allow your board members to get acquainted with one another, learn to work together *and* have some good natured fun. Need ideas? Search for "team building activities" on the internet.

Remember to go over background material about the association and bring them up to date on the issues facing the board. No board member likes to be caught off guard. Allow plenty of time for questions and answers.

With a solid orientation, your new officers will start contributing right away during the meetings, develop good working relationships with veteran board members and your PTA/PTSA will thrive! ☆

1 The Roles & Responsibilities of Board Members

In addition to the duties outlined in your bylaws, board members are legally obligated to prudently and reasonably conduct themselves in a manner that will preserve and protect the organization. These fiduciary responsibilities are described below:

- **Duty of Care** describes the level of competence expected of a board member. Board members owe the duty to exercise reasonable care when he or she makes a decision as a representative of PTA.
- **Duty of Obedience** requires board members to be faithful to the organization's mission. It is not permitted to act in a way inconsistent with the central goals of the organization.
- **Duty of Loyalty** is a standard of faithfulness. It is imperative that undivided allegiance is given when making decisions affecting the organization. Information obtained as a board member can never be used for personal gain and he or she must act in the best interests of the organization.

When planning your board orientation, allow time to discuss these legal responsibilities. ☆

2 Teamwork and Board Relationships

Create a culture of teamwork in your board by making a commitment to taking powerful steps that cultivate a team mentality. Team building is something that should be a regular focus on your board and will lead to long-term, effective, collaboration.

Try these ideas to inspire positive, cohesive relationships within your board:

- Clearly communicate that teamwork and collaboration is expected
- Model teamwork in your interactions with the board and your membership
- Recognize and reward teamwork
- Build fun and shared occasions into your "regular" meeting agendas
- Encourage the group to openly discuss real issues and evaluate current processes that may or may not be working
- Come to a consensus on new project goals and what steps you will take to achieve them before putting them into action

Infusing a teamwork culture and your board will contribute more than they ever thought possible, together! ☆

3 Identifying Operational Norms

Do your board meetings start on time? Do members observe common courtesies of conversation and avoid disruptive side conversations? Does your organization follow Robert's Rules of Order? Are important decisions made after lively debates, or are they made beforehand then simply rubber-stamped at meetings?

The rules or standards considered appropriate (or not) and their underlying meaning are operation, or group, norms. Ambiguous, arbitrary or restrictive norms inhibit boards from achieving full participation, promoting mutual understanding, and developing inclusive solutions to problems.

Although often unstated, group norms guide problem-solving, decision-making, how conflict should be handled, and many other processes. Together with its core values, clear mission, and shared vision, norms give your PTA or PTSA its fundamental structure and direction. They are far too important to ignore.

When it comes to group norms, the question isn't whether they are good or bad, but:

- Which norms help the group achieve its purposes, and which are harmful or inhibiting?
- Which norms are compatible with the goals and values of the group and under what conditions?
- How can the norms be changed or reconsidered to permit the group to achieve its purposes under conditions of maximizing its resources?

It's easy for small groups to create their own sub-culture, developing a code of behavior for what should and should not be done under certain circumstances. Use the article on the next page, Establishing Team Norms, to take a close look at your board's norms and ensure there is a framework that will allow your service for PTA to shine through in its true spirit – advocating for kids. ☆



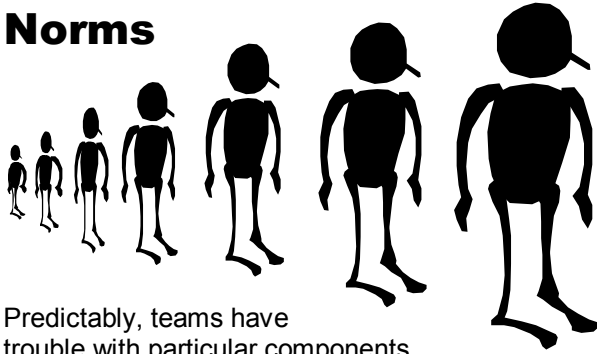
Share with us!

Did your board have a meaningful, productive orientation that left your PTA/PTSA ready to take on the year?! Let us know!

Michigan PTSA is looking for great examples of successful board orientation activities to share with other PTA/PTSA officers. Send a description of your meeting activity, discussion or project to 7402 Westshire Dr. Suite 115, Lansing, MI, 48917 or email us at communications@michiganpta.org ☆

Establishing the Team

Norms



Predictably, teams have trouble with particular components of interpersonal communication and interaction. You will want to develop norms in these areas for team success. The questions below are designed to assist you and your PTA/PTSA team as you establish your norms.

- ***Is any one individual's opinions or needs more important than the rest of the team?***

Questions like this one will help you get to agreements such as: all team members are equal; every team member's opinion will be thoughtfully considered; each team member will keep all commitments by the agreed upon due date; each team member agrees to constantly assess whether team members are honoring their commitment to the team norms.

- ***Is it okay to disrespect or not listen to another team member? Or not participate in meetings?***

Questions such as these will help the group establish norms like: team members will speak respectfully to each other; will not talk down to each other; will positively recognize and thank each other for team contributions, team members will listen without interrupting; hold no side or competing conversations; follow the rules for effective meetings; attend the meeting on time; always work from an agenda; minutes will be recorded at each meeting; end meetings on time.

- ***If there is a problem with a team member, who, how and where will it be addressed?***

Questions such as this one will help the group agree to norms like: complaints about team members will be addressed first in the team, team members will make certain they have agreement on what and when to communicate.

- ***How will we make decisions? Resolve conflict?***

These questions help the group establish parameters such as: team members will make decisions by consensus, but majority will rule if timely consensus is not reached; conflicts will be resolved directly with the persons in conflict. ☆

Breaking the Ice

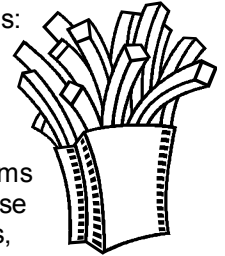
A carefully planned activity that will allow the group to begin to get to know each other is a great way to kick off your board orientation.

There are thousands of ideas available on the internet. An example of a simple but effective one is provided below. This activity also allows a unit or council president to develop a better understanding of their individual team members.

A Few of My Favorite Things

Number of Participants: 12 or less
Supplies: Flip chart & Markers
Time: 10 minutes
Preparation: On the flip chart, write a list similar to the following:

1. My favorite comfort food is:
2. The last movie I saw in the theater is:
3. What I like to do in my free time is:
4. My guilty pleasure is:
5. If I weren't here right now, I'd be:



Go around the room, have people respond to the list. If the crowd seems reluctant, the leader should start. Use examples to show how many things, besides the desire to help children, attendees have in common. Make a mental note of who likes to do what as a hobby or a guilty pleasure. Later in the meeting, refer back to the hobbies or other facts to demonstrate how people can find ways to connect others together. Often, a PTA/PTSA can tap into the expertise or hobbies of officers and PTA/PTSA members to maximize programming or volunteering opportunities.

When selecting your ice breaker, be sure to take into consideration the special needs of your group. The more you put into your ice breaker, the greater your rewards will be. Have fun laying the foundation for your PTA/PTSA team! ☆

Who Knew?!

A global trends research study said professionals are looking for ways to use their skills to benefit the community! Some interesting facts include:

- There's a rapid increase in community demand for volunteers with business skills and expertise
- Corporate volunteers have a growing desire to apply not only their general skills, but their work skills in particular to assist the community

Get creative and get those professional skills working for kids! ☆

Orientation Checklist

General Information

- History, vision & mission of PTA
- Organizational / board structure
- Copy of charter & bylaws
- Strategic priorities, goals and objectives
- Summary of the programs and services
- List of board members and contact information

Roles and Responsibilities

- Review boards' role
- Review officers' roles
- Review principal's / superintendent's role
- Review committees and their roles
- Discuss expectations for and of new board members

Policies and Procedures

- Provide new members with board policies and procedure books
- Review board policies and procedures with new board members

Financial Management

- Discuss budget process
- Provide current year's budget
- Provide a copy of audited financial statements
- Provide a copy of most recent annual report

Other Information

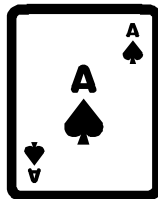
- Provide copies of minutes from previous board meetings
- Give a tour of facilities / offices, if needed
- Provide copies of brochures and other materials
- Have new board members sign required paper work (i.e. signature cards, confidentiality, etc.)
- Have fun together! ☆

People Power

Presidents don't have to do it all! Utilizing fellow officers and/or inviting in speakers/presenters from outside of your PTA/PTSA can improve relations with others and improve the experience for participants. Here are a few examples those who may be able to lend some support:

- Past Presidents
- Principal/Superintendent
- Community Leaders
- Local College Faculty
- Fellow Officers
- Michigan PTSA Board ☆

An Ace Up Your Sleeve



Great leaders don't have all of the answers, but they know where to find them! Below is a list of resources that can help you on the road to PTA success:

www.michiganptsa.org

Looking for electronic versions of Quick Reference Guides or officer support materials? This site is one-stop shopping for PTA/PTSA leaders.

www.pta.org

PTA history, legislative positions, parenting resources and e-learning...make time to get acquainted with all this site has to offer.

www.mnaonline.org

Michigan Nonprofit Association has great resources available to nonprofits. Select the "Resources" tab for some good stuff for nonprofit boards.

Log on and take advantage of these great tools! ☆

Sample Orientation Agenda

The following agenda should be modified by the PTA/PTSA to meet its own nature and needs. During review of the topics marked with an "*", provide brief presentation about the topic and then provide time for open discussion and to address questions from participants.

Topic	Length of Time (minutes)
Welcome	
Review of agenda*	
Introduction of participants	
Ice Breaker	
Overview of PTA*	
Orientation to board manual/materials*	
Roles and responsibilities of board*	
Review of board structure, listing of current officers, committees, and committee chairs	
Overview of board operations* Review key points from bylaws and board policies, board operations, sample committee work plans, and sample meeting agenda and minutes	
Administrative activities, for example, set the schedule for next year's board meetings, etc.	
Next steps Reminders for upcoming activities and events	
Meeting evaluation	
