

### Tip for Sharing

Your legislative chair and others interested in advocating on behalf of children will want to refer to this “Legislative” section, including “Where We Stand” on issues.

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\*See the “Reproducible Materials” section of this manual for the brochure *Join National PTA's Member-to-Member Network*.

## National PTA Legislative Activities—Roles and Responsibilities

The authority for National PTA's legislative activity is the third Purpose of the PTA: "To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth."

Since its inception in 1897, National PTA has recognized that an organization dedicated to the welfare of children and youth must inevitably concern itself with the laws that affect or may be needed to protect children. Local, council, district, and state PTAs can join National PTA in speaking out for federal legislation that promotes the welfare of children and youth.

National PTA, through its legislative program, makes its voice effectively heard with respect to proposed and enacted laws and regulations that pertain to the health, education, and welfare of the children and youth of the United States.

Guidance for legislative activity is provided by resolutions with legislative intent that are approved by delegates at the Annual National PTA Convention and by position statements adopted by the National PTA Board of Directors.

*Legislative policy statements* also define the scope of the National PTA program and specify certain qualifications that must be met by any congressional bill or federal rule or regulation pertaining to children and youth before it can receive National PTA consideration.

Many people help to move PTA's legislative agenda forward; these include,

- **Legislation committee**—National PTA's president appoints the legislation committee members. The committee consists of four (4) members, one (1) chair. Members are appointed at the postconvention board meeting and serve a two-year term.
- **National PTA staff**—The director and staff of National PTA's office in Washington, DC, work in cooperation with the legislation chair.
- **Federal legislative chairs**—Each state PTA should have a federal PTA legislative chair who works with National PTA to communicate PTA's position to members of Congress and the PTA grassroots network in his or her state. National PTA staff in Washington, DC, work through the federal legislative chairs and the state presidents to channel information to state PTA boards, districts, councils, and local PTA membership, providing information about federal issues involving or affecting children and youth.

## Member-to-Member Network

National PTA's Member-to-Member Network is the grassroots advocacy system that provides direct contact by PTA members with members of Congress, and occasionally with federal regulatory agencies. When contact is needed, National PTA's Washington, DC, office issues, legislative Action Alerts via e-mail describing the pending legislative issue and the action needed.

Individuals in the Member-to-Member Network are responsible for communicating with their senators and representatives about National PTA legislative positions. Members are expected to respond to the legislative Action Alerts, which identify specific activities PTA members can do to promote the PTA's position on an issue, as well as provide background information and talking points.

To be added to the Member-to-Member Network, register by completing an application that can be downloaded, or submitted online, from the legislative section of National PTA's website, [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org). You can also sign up by contacting your state PTA's federal legislative chair through your state PTA office. Periodic updates of the list are mailed to the federal legislative chair and state presidents.

By joining the Member-to-Member Network, PTA members will receive National PTA's weekly legislative newsletter, *This Week in Washington*, which reports on legislation, research, hearings, or press events related to issues of national priority.

See the "Reproducible Materials" section of this manual for the brochure *Join National PTA's Member-to-Member Network*.

## IRS Rules on Lobbying by Nonprofit Organizations

As permissible under federal tax laws, PTA members may engage in legislative activities on behalf of children and youth and may educate the general public and policy makers about officially adopted PTA positions and resolutions. As long as they remain strictly nonpartisan, PTA members may educate the general public about issues affecting children.

PTA is allowed to attempt to influence legislation through lobbying efforts, but PTAs may not devote more than an insubstantial part of their activities to influence legislation (generally interpreted as not exceeding 5 percent of gross income).

National PTA is a 501(c)(3) organization, which according to Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rules is a tax-exempt public charity. Because of PTA's status, donors to National PTA may deduct their contributions to the extent permissible under tax laws. To maintain its charitable status, National PTA may not campaign for or against candidates for federal, state, or local public office.

## Campaigning

### Contributing to Political Action Committees

The PTA, at any level, *may not contribute to a political action committee* (PAC), which is defined as an entity whose whole purpose is to influence the election of any individual to public office.

**Exception: PAC support of ballot issues**—A PAC may be supported when it takes a position on a ballot issue (such as for a zoning or constitutional matter, school levy, or statewide referendum). To the extent that a state PAC law clearly, precisely, and definitively distinguishes between activities to support issues and those to support candidates, PTAs may engage in issue-oriented activity (within Internal Revenue Code [IRC] limits) with the understanding that the appropriate record keeping and reporting requirements are maintained. If there are any questions about a state PAC, an appropriate professional with expertise in regulatory law should be consulted.

### Conducting Candidates' Forums

PTAs may conduct candidates' forums alone or as part of a coalition with other nonpartisan groups. All candidates for the public office involved must be invited and asked to present their views at the meeting. A nonpartisan moderator should be in charge, and fair procedures must be established and agreed to in advance.

### PTA Leaders Seeking and Holding Public Office

National PTA cannot and will not dictate to any member whether or not he may serve on a school board or in public office.\* The decision to serve in public office is solely up to the individual. However, this decision can and does have implications for, and reflects on, the PTA. There are several considerations PTAs need to keep in mind when a PTA leader contemplates holding public office, such as becoming a member of a school board. *PTA leader*, for purpose of this information piece, shall be considered the president, legisla-

tive chair, and any other officer and board member who speaks regularly for the public record on behalf of the unit, council, district, state, or National PTA. We request that PTA leaders seeking public office should consider the following:

- If a political campaign is involved, the PTA leader should not use his or her position as a speaking platform. In other words, when speaking for PTA the candidacy should not be referred to, and when speaking as a candidate, reference to PTA should not be included in the speech. PTA paper, equipment, or personnel should never be used in developing a campaign for public office.
- During the political campaign the PTA leader should not wear or distribute campaign material while presiding, presenting, or attending any PTA meeting or event.\*\* While presiding, the PTA leader should not allow members to wear or distribute campaign material on his or her behalf.\*\*
- There should be serious consideration given to possible conflicts of interest if the PTA official becomes a public official.

Adopted by National PTA Board of Directors (September 2000) and reviewed by National PTA's legal counsel.

## Advocacy for Children and Youth

What you do to improve laws, policies, and conditions on behalf of children is advocacy, whether in your community or at the state and federal levels. PTA defines *advocacy* as the act of mobilizing individuals and local PTAs to work with the state and National PTAs to spark changes in programs and policies that benefit children.

An effective advocacy campaign is built on activities and events that keep the PTA issue visible and motivate people to act. This section of the manual is meant to empower PTA's greatest strength—its members—with effective strategies and resources for advocacy.

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\*National PTA reserves the right to limit the national partisan political activity of its elected officers.

\*\*A PTA leader must check with state laws to verify that not being allowed to wear campaign buttons is in violation of the freedom of speech within a particular state, e.g., at a PTA-sponsored event in a public park.

## Setting the Stage for Advocacy

PTA members can

- Provide awareness of current issues and the advocacy work others are doing to start people thinking about what they can do in their own community,
- Bring issues of state or national concern to the local school or community level to generate interest and activity,
- Provide advocacy training in small-group sessions,
- Keep members continually updated regarding issues to encourage advocacy,
- Involve people who want to be involved in ways that allow them to use their special skills.

## Choosing an Issue

Often there are more child-related issues than a PTA can effectively address. So, how do we decide where we will focus our advocacy efforts? First, we focus on an issue, not a problem. For example, crowded classrooms are a problem; the larger issue could be inadequate facilities or lack of funding for staff. Then we determine the following:

- Does this issue fit within PTA's Mission and Purposes?
- How does this issue concern young people in the school and community?
- What is the desired outcome?
- Can the issue be made understandable to those within and outside of PTA?
- Does the membership want to work on the issue?

## Researching the Issue

Know as much as possible about the background of the issue. You can

- Find as many sources of information about the issue as possible,
- Research the arguments both for and against,
- Know who supports and opposes the issue,
- Conduct surveys and opinion polls in the community,
- Use National PTA's resolutions and position statements on the issue.

## Organizing for Action

Policy makers and the general public listen if a large group of people speaks out. Key elements to a campaign are a strong message, outreach, and planning. A well-defined action plan that unites people behind an issue will include the following:

- Goals that are both long- and short-term (have a long-range vision, but plan some activities that can be accomplished within a few weeks or months)
- Knowledge of what is required in terms of money, time, and commitment
- A list of groups that have the most to gain and the most to lose
- Targets—those who can affect the outcome of the issue (school boards, legislators, voters)
- Tactics that fit the goals and involve many people in a variety of activities

## Communicating PTA's Position

There are many ways in which PTA members can speak with one voice for children. Presenting your personal perspective when communicating with policy makers, yet knowing that PTA's advocacy strength comes from our collective voice, is important to relay the PTA message. Whether you're communicating one-on-one, by telephone, or in a letter, e-mail, or fax, relay the PTA position.

## Testifying and Speaking in Public

Speaking publicly, whether in debate, as a panelist, or as spokesperson before a group, is a part of advocacy. Public testimony can be before a school board, a town council, or state or federal legislators. In either a written or oral statement give the PTA's position and how you want policy makers to respond. When presenting,

- Prepare both content (what you'll say) and delivery (how you'll say it);
- Know your audience; say what's important to them;
- Emphasize key points over and over;
- Use visual aids if appropriate;
- Be brief.

### Personal Visits

Personal visits are a most effective way to communicate with policy makers. You may want to visit policy makers in pairs or small groups. Too large a group can prevent meaningful discussion. The following are tips for successful visits:

- Schedule an appointment. If possible, identify who from the PTA will attend the meeting.
- Draft an agenda and list the issues to be discussed. If it's a group meeting, decide who will speak, and on what issues.
- Be open to questions. If you don't know the answer, explain that you'll get back with more information.
- Ask how the policy maker will vote on the issue.

### Letters and Postcards

Letters not only alert policy makers to your views, but they help educate members about issues and involve them in advocacy. Letters should express an opinion in the writer's own words. Avoid form letters, but modify model letters or talking points so that you communicate PTA's message in a way that speaks with one voice for all children.

When writing, give attention to the following:

- Give the PTA position,
- Show how the issue will affect the legislator's constituents,
- Explain what action you want to happen.

### Phone Calls, E-mail, Faxes

Phone calls, e-mail, and faxes are effective, especially when timing is critical and a policy maker's support or vote is needed immediately. Following are tips for communicating your views:

- When phoning, ask to speak to the lawmaker or an aide who handles the issue;
- When e-mailing or faxing, address the lawmaker or the aide;
- Explain you are from the lawmaker's district;
- Give the bill number and name;
- Explain why the issue is important to your PTA;
- Ask the lawmaker to vote in your favor.

To send e-mail via National PTA's website, go to <http://capwiz.com/npta2/dbq/officials>.

### Telephone Trees

A telephone tree increases the number of contacts with policy makers. This system allows a few lead callers to generate responses from a large number of PTA members. In a telephone tree system, lead callers have a list of members who have agreed to make a call to their legislators. Having reliable lead callers and accurate, brief information to pass along will help ensure success.

### Using the Media

Taking your message to the public means using all the opportunities available in the media in the most effective manner. Some possibilities follow:

Cultivate relationships with media contacts (newspapers, radio, cable station) and develop a trust level. Be concise, specific, and factual when you discuss your ideas. Present details about the local impact of your concern. Serve as an information resource who can be relied on to have the most up-to-date, factual information concerning the issue at hand.

### Advocacy Resources

**National PTA *Annual Resources for PTAs*** outlines basic policies and procedures of National PTA.

***Our Children***, the magazine of National PTA, contains information on advocacy and children's legislative issues, as well as general interest and PTA-related articles.

**National PTA website ([www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org))** provides information about PTA legislative issues and initiatives under legislative information.

***This Week in Washington*** is a weekly electronic newsletter from National PTA that focuses on top legislative issues affecting children and families. PTA members and nonmembers can subscribe to the newsletter by visiting the PTA and Washington section of National PTA's website.

**"Where We Stand,"** pages 8–10 of the "Legislative Activities" of this manual, compiles and briefly describes all the resolutions and position statements that are currently active for the association.

**Resolutions and Position Statements Notebook** contains current PTA resolutions and position statements. The notebook is available in state PTA offices and through state PTA presidents.

**Historical Record Notebook** contains retired PTA resolutions, position statements, and legislative directives. The notebook is available in state PTA offices and through state PTA presidents.

**Advocacy Manual** is used to train members in advocacy skills. It contains step-by-step information as well as visual aids. The training is available through state PTA offices and from National PTA board members.

**National PTA Action Alerts** are sent to the National PTA Board of Directors, federal legislative chairs, Member-to-Member Network, state PTA presidents, state PTA offices, and the National Council of States. They are calls to action for these members to lobby legislators on issues of immediate concern.

## Contact Information

The Internet offers a wealth of information about the programs and people in the branches of government. E-mail addresses allow direct electronic contact. The following addresses may be helpful in linking to elected and appropriate officials.

U.S. Congress  
<http://thomas.loc.gov>

The White House  
[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)  
e-mail: [president@whitehouse.gov](mailto:president@whitehouse.gov)

Department of Education  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)  
e-mail: [customerservice@inet.ed.gov](mailto:customerservice@inet.ed.gov)

To contact members of Congress and the President of the United States call the Capitol Hill switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or the White House Comment Line at (202) 456-1111.

### National PTA Washington DC Office

Advocacy Liaison  
1090 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 1200  
Washington, DC 20005-4905  
Phone: (202) 289-6790 | Fax: (202) 289-6791  
E-mail: [info@pta.org](mailto:info@pta.org) | [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

### Where We Stand

#### National PTA Resolutions and Position Statements as of February 2005

This summary has been developed as only a reference to all current resolutions (R) and position statements (PS) adopted by National PTA since 1957. The information is paraphrased and is not the complete position of National PTA and, therefore, cannot be used to quote National PTA positions.

When representing the stand of National PTA, quoting positions of National PTA, or providing public statements, please use only material from the official National PTA Resolutions and Positions.\*

This summary has been provided as a convenient overview of positions of National PTA, as an aid in the development of new resolutions, and to assist in responding to questions regarding positions of National PTA on various issues. Interpretation of a National PTA position requires referral to the appropriate resolutions or position statements or both.

#### Alcohol and Other Drugs

##### Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment—2002 (PS).

Maintains that prevention and treatment reduces alcohol and drug abuse. Believes substance abuse is primarily a health problem and not a criminal justice issue.

#### Child Safety and Protection

**Child Safety and Protection—2003 (PS).** Urges PTA members on all levels to monitor, support, and advocate for laws and ordinances for the safety and protection of children.

#### Citizenship and Equality of Opportunity

**Citizenship and Equity—2002 (PS).** Supports continued respect for, and expansion of civil rights. Requires they be defended whenever threatened and that children and youth be taught the significance of civil rights and responsibilities in American culture.

#### Cooperative Role of Parents and Education Professionals

**Background Checks on Teachers—1995 (R).** Supports background checks on teachers before the issuance or renewal of a license or permit by the licensing agency, and on teachers who hold a life license (a license with no expiration date). Calls upon each state PTA to review its laws and urge its legislature to enact a “Background Checks on Teachers” bill that best fits the needs of its state for the protection of children.

##### Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Services—1983 (R).

Urges PTAs to support and seek funding for a comprehensive guidance and counseling plan to provide services for all children.

##### Parent/Family Involvement: Effective Parent Involvement Programs to Foster Student Success—1999 (PS).

Recognizes the research that demonstrates that when parents are involved, students achieve more regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or parents' education level and affirms the organization's role in helping parents and schools connect for the good of the child.

##### Parent Involvement in Site-Based Shared Decision Making—1992 (R).

Calls for National PTA and its constituent organizations to advocate for legislation, policies, and bargaining agreements that protect the right of parent involvement in site-based, shared decision making.

##### The Principal, the School's Education Leader—1993 (PS).

Recognizes that the principal is the leader of the school.

**Relationship of PTA to Education Organizations—1987 (PS).** Promotes equitable working relationships with all groups of public school personnel.

**Shared Responsibility in Education Decision Making—1999 (PS).** Supports shared responsibility in development of school policies and curriculum decisions, and urges school boards to cooperate with parents, teachers, students, principals, administrators, and the public.

**Strengthening Support of Public School Teachers—1983 (R).** Supports public education and the profession of public school teachers.

##### Teacher Negotiations, Sanctions, and Strikes—1987 (PS).

Recognizes the reality of teacher negotiations, sanctions, and strikes as a part of operating public schools; and has established guidelines for state PTAs, councils, and local units to follow before, during, and after a strike period to avoid PTAs being caught in a dilemma because of their strategic position.

**Teacher Preparation for Parent/Family Involvement—1993 (R).** Supports a requirement in teacher preparation for parent/family involvement through the accreditation of teacher education programs by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

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\*Position Statements and Resolutions are accessible on [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org).

**Teacher Preparation and Staff Development—1993 (PS).** Recognizes that education opportunities for students in the public schools of this nation are dependent on the quality of instructional programs and personnel. Recognizes teacher preparation, staff development, and renewal as critical investments in children. Constituent PTA bodies should encourage and support adequately funded teacher preparation and staff development programs.

## Cultural Arts

**The Arts in Education—2003 (PS).** Advocates improved arts education programs in the schools as essential curricula and urges PTAs to create public awareness of the lifelong value of the arts.

## Desegregation

**U.S. Supreme Court Decision Regarding Segregation—1982 (PS).** Encourages state and local PTA leaders and school and government authorities to work together toward a just solution to the complex problem of segregation in public schools.

## Discipline

**Recommendation on Corporal Punishment—1988 (PS).** Supports efforts to abolish corporal punishment and to develop alternative discipline programs to provide an orderly climate for learning.

## Education Emphasis

**Education Emphasis—2004 (PS).** Supports equal educational opportunities and places an increased emphasis on all aspects of public education including assessment and testing, school choice, report cards, educational programs, and early childhood education and development.

**After School Programs—2004 (R).** Encourages local, state, and federal governments to invest in more funding for after school programs. Also encourages schools and communities to work to establish quality after school programs, which are accessible to all children.

## Environmental

**Environmental Health and Safety—2003 (PS).** Recognizes the growing importance of environmental issues and the impact that they have on health and welfare of children and their families. Supports programs, research, and data collection about environmental hazards and health risks to improve the quality of the environment.

**School Buildings' and Portable Classrooms' Indoor Air Quality—1998 (R).** Encourages school systems to ensure that school heating, ventilation, and air conditioning operation and maintenance plans comply with the highest current standards, and urges the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to adopt guidelines to ensure the quality of schools' indoor air.

**School Facilities—1995 (PS).** States National PTA's belief that the school environment significantly impacts students' academic achievement. Requests that state PTAs work to ensure that all children receive the chance for a quality education in facilities that are safe, well equipped, and sufficiently maintained.

## Health and Nutrition

**Elements of Comprehensive School Health Programs—2002 (PS).** Supports comprehensive health programs encompassing health education, health services, and a healthy school environment, and lists components that should be included. Urges schools to form partnerships with parents and the community to provide effective comprehensive school health programs.

**National Health Reform and Access to Care for Children, Youth, Families, and Pregnant Women—2002 (PS).** States National PTA's belief that health is based on the quality of life of the whole child—emotional, intellectual, physical, and social—and that all elements must be considered before optimum health can exist. Supports legislation to assist states and localities to develop and fund comprehensive health-care programs, including school-linked health clinics, and provide equitable access to quality affordable health care for all children, youth, and pregnant women.

**Nutritional Eating Requirements in Our Schools to Combat Childhood Obesity—2004 (R).** Support and promote the importance of healthy eating for children by utilizing parents, community, school administrators, and health specialists to determine the selection of products available in vending machines, cafeterias, or school stores.

**Nutrition for Children and Families—2002 (PS).** Recognizes good nutrition as a key component in creating healthy and productive individuals and the need for current and accurate nutrition education for children and families. Supports age-appropriate nutrition education and programs that provide parents and families with information and skills to make informed nutrition, diet, and health decisions.

## Legislative Activities

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**Physical Education—2003 (R).** Advocates for funding for physical education programs and supports daily physical education programs as an integral part of children's education.

**Libraries and Educational Materials—2004 (PS).** Supports the rights of parents to guide their children in choosing appropriate reading and educational materials. Supports the rights of public libraries and schools to provide materials and information that are historical, and that are free of censorship based on bias, partisanship, or doctrinal disapproval.

### Mass Media

**Mass Media—1996 (PS).** States National PTA's belief that the right of free speech must be upheld and that no group has the right to use coercive actions to suppress material that it finds objectionable. Seeks to provide information to parents and educators so they can make informed judgments about the effects of mass media and electronic media on the development of children and youth and encourages further research on the effects of mass media and technology.

### PTA Organizational Decisions

**Broadening Citizen Involvement in PTA/PTSA—1983 (R).** Encourages PTAs to include on their boards individuals without children and to involve senior citizens in PTA activities.

**Increase in National PTA Dues—2001 (PS).** Helps sustain National PTA's position as the leading child advocacy organization in the nation through a dues increase of \$0.50, making the total dues \$1.75 per member effective April 1, 2002.

**Volunteer Mileage Deduction—1989 (R).** Supports a revision to the Internal Revenue Code to allow volunteers the same standard deduction for their mileage rate as that used by business people.

### Spiritual Education

**Role of Religion in Publicly Funded Educational and Social Services—2001 (PS).** Support for private religious rights and its opposition to publicly funded religious instruction, worship, or indoctrination, and affirms the support for local control of public school facility access policies. Sets forth National PTA's opposition to public funding for institutions that may discriminate based on religion in employment or the provision of services. The statement also calls for identical standards of accountability to be applied to all recipients of public funds.

**Supreme Court Decisions on Prayer in the Public Schools—1987 (PS).** The decisions of the Supreme Court on the reading of the Bible and the use of prayer in the public schools were a step taken under the Constitution of the United States to protect our religious liberties, not to infringe upon them. PTAs should avoid bringing pressure to continue any practices that the constituted authorities find unlawful. As voluntary and private associations, PTAs may determine what observances at their own meetings best meet their membership needs.

**Teaching About Religion in the Public Schools—1981 (R).** States that National PTA and its constituent bodies will develop programs designed to promote understanding of Supreme Court decisions regarding religion in public schools.

### Support for Public Education

**Support of Public Education—2003 (PS).** Supports and encourages excellence in public education and states that the components of this excellence are parent and community involvement; quality instruction programs; competent, caring educators; business involvement; and adequate funding.