



# RESOURCE GUIDE

**New York State**  
**PTA<sup>®</sup>**  
*everychild.one voice.<sup>®</sup>*

**advocacy**

New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc.

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# PTA advocacy

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**New York State**

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# PTA advocacy

## PTA advocacy is:

“Awakening of the civilized world to the needs, the possibilities of the child, and pointing the way to his (her) harmonious development.”

*Mother’s Magazine*, Vol. 1, No.1  
(The National PTA’s first magazine)

This statement, written in 1898, expresses the aspirations of the founders of PTA and shows that PTA advocacy encompasses all activities that serve to preserve and improve public education as well as ensuring the “care and protection of children and youth” at home, in the school, and in the community.

PTA advocacy is often thought of as activities to affect public policy and legislate change on behalf of children and youth, but it is actually much more.

“Any action PTA members take to improve the lives of children, whether in their communities or at the state and federal level, is advocacy.”

*(from National PTA Building Successful Partnerships, A Guide for Developing Parent and Family Involvement Programs)*

## National PTA, as the nation’s oldest and largest child advocacy association, has as its mission:

The overall purpose of PTA is to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

**New York State PTA’s Vision Statement:** Making every child’s potential a reality by establishing the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (New York State PTA) as the premier

organization for parent involvement and advocacy for all children.

Parents are already advocates for their children in their parental roles as nurturers, teachers, communicators, advisors, supporters, collaborators and decision-makers. When parents work together in PTA, the advocacy skills they possess and use for the benefit of their own children are used for the benefit of all the children and youth in the school, community, state or nation.

Each PTA unit, council or region participates in advocacy efforts every time they:

- Present a program on an issue
- Distribute a newsletter
- Network with other PTAs
- Offer a student or teacher scholarship
- Participate in programs such as Reflections or Pick a Reading Partner (PARP)
- Host a ‘parent university’ or public forum
- Write a legislator
- Meet with the school administrator
- Write a letter to the editor of the community newspaper
- Initiate a safety campaign
- Post information on social media vehicles

Every action to improve the lives of children is advocacy.

## what else is advocacy?

- Participating in a PTA convention
- Raising community awareness on a PTA issue
- Sharing information so that parents understand the latest academic requirements in New York
- Duplicating and distributing sections of PTA magazines, resource guides, websites and workshop handouts
- Participating in a parent-teacher conference

- Speaking on behalf of an issue affecting children and youth before the school board

While an individual may speak on an issue for which PTA already has a position, if a PTA as a group wishes to undertake activities on a position, the activity plan must be first approved by the membership. Watch for **PTA Advocacy Alerts** for detailed information on important issues, which can be duplicated easily for distribution to your members. Following the annual Legislation/Education Conference, participate in special New York State PTA March Advocacy activities, i.e. Lobby Day, Virtual Lobby Day and the Key/Local Advocacy Partners program.

PTA leaders should be knowledgeable about PTA positions and should have and refer to important documents such as “Basic Policy” and “Where We Stand” before embarking on any advocacy campaign. Feel free to contact your assistant or associate director or your region PTA director. They are experienced PTA leaders (usually former PTA unit or council presidents) who have volunteered to help. **Refer to page 7** for an explanation of how PTA positions are adopted.

Much of what follows in this section under “Legislative Activities” and “Going from Issue to Resolution” can, and should, be adapted to local use as the model for tackling an issue.

In addition, remember that the many resources of all levels of PTA are easily accessible to support advocacy efforts. Consult and use them all. Websites and telephone numbers are given in the Appendix for a variety of helpful agencies, organizations and other resources.

## legislative activities

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 units to work with the State and National PTA to **spark changes** in programs and policies that **benefit all children and youth**.

*How can PTA members begin to think as advocates? How can members become involved in advocacy? How do we generate enthusiasm for advocacy? How do we convince our membership that “speaking out” for children is something ALL of us CAN do?*

### we 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 down 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 the PTA’s Mission and Objectives?
- Review “Where We Stand” to determine PTA’s position on this topic.
- If the issue is a New York State PTA or National PTA legislative priority, there may be information available on

- the state and National PTA websites.
- How does this issue concern young people in the school and/or community?
- What is the desired outcome?
- Can this issue be made understandable to those within and outside of PTA?
- Is the issue winnable?
- Is this an issue that you can use to engage others?

### 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 issues.
- Conduct surveys and opinion polls in the community.

- Collect background material on what has already happened.
- Keep current on what is happening.
- Personalize the issue to know how it impacts your school district and children.

### determine the decision-maker

You must determine who can take action on your issue. In some cases your local school or your school district can solve the problem. The Regents determine the educational regulations and the standards/assessments that the State Education Department implements. The Regents regulations carry the same impact as laws for the school districts. The governor and the legislature are responsible for providing funding and for passing new laws for education, juvenile protection, health and safety, etc.

*continued on page 4*

## legislative activities, con't.

### lobbying guidelines

Once an issue has been decided on, the unit or council should support going forward with organized activities. Typically, a person is identified as the spokesman. When this person speaks for PTA, the PTA position must be supported. A PTA officer will be perceived as speaking for the PTA, even if the person isn't officially designated as the spokesman. **Remember that PTA is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization and can lobby for issues, but cannot support candidates.**

### organize for action

Policy makers and the general public listen if a large group of people speaks out. Organize your PTA membership and spend time constantly communicating with the membership. Reach out to the community and other groups. Develop an action plan to unite people behind an issue and to have focused action. The action plan should 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 people who can affect the outcome of the issue (school boards, legislators, voters, influential organizations).
- Tactics that fit the goals and involve many people in a variety of activities.
- A timeline of specific goals, steps to achieve each goal, and volunteers responsible for each step.

### developing the plan

An effective advocacy association is built on activities and events that keep the PTA issue on the radar screen, and cause people to pay attention to your cause. The following actions are key to the campaign:

- **Design** a strong message. Fit the message to your goals. Make it understandable and simple.
- **Reach out** to your members. Survey to find out how they feel. Target newsletters, social media and membership meetings to get the message out.
- Reach out to the community. **Conduct** opinion polls to get a feel for community support/opposition.
- **Establish coalitions** for broader outreach. An effective coalition has a common focus, but brings additional data and resources.

### communicating with lawmakers

Following are tips for working with policy makers if your issue is legislative:

- Know your legislators. Find out their committee assignments. Know their background.

- Know your legislators' positions. Examine their voting records and get on their mailing lists. Learn more about senators at [www.nysenate.gov](http://www.nysenate.gov) and about assembly members at [www.assembly.state.ny.us](http://www.assembly.state.ny.us).
- Get acquainted with the legislator's staff. Know who handles specific issues. Visit the staff in the district office.
- Begin the lobbying process early. Start before any bill appears in the legislature.
- If your issue is already in a bill, know the bill name and number. Keep track of the bill through the Bill Search tab on the Assembly and Senate sites.
- Select only one or two issues. Stick with the PTA positions.
- Don't be intimidated by the legislator, or by questions that you can't answer. Tell the legislator that you will get back to the legislator with the answer.
- Be respectful and don't create a position that will force the legislator to become defensive.
- Be explicit about what action you want the legislator to take on your behalf. Leave information on your position.
- Follow up on your visit. Write a letter to your legislator to thank





## legislative activities, con't.

him/her for meeting with you and to reinforce your discussion of the issues.

### using the media

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

- Be concise, specific and factual when discussing your ideas.
- Present details about the local impact of your concern, especially how it impacts children.
- Be an information resource that can be relied on to have the most up-to-date, factual information concerning the issue.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know an answer, then try to get the information back to the person requesting it as soon as possible.
- Try to state information in a positive manner.
- In today's society and today's media, short sound bites of factual information are the best ways to convey your message.

Try to use newspapers as a key media. If they don't cover the issue as a news story, use letters to the editors or opinion editorials. Be prepared if the media contact you. If they call on the phone, and you are not prepared to discuss an item with them, ask if you can call back.

### letters and postcards

Personal contact is the most effective manner of persuasion, but may not always be possible. Letters not only alert policy makers to your views, but they help educate members about issues and involve them in advocacy. Letters should be handwritten or typed and express an opinion in the writer's own words. New York State PTA

provides form letters and postcards, as well as copy for online communications, that can be used to communicate PTA positions with government officials.

When writing, give attention to the following:

- Stick to one subject.
- Give the PTA position.
- Be accurate, polite and positive.
- Explain what action you want to happen.
- Show how the issue will affect the legislator's constituents.
- Mention that you are a constituent.
- Reference how many PTA members, students or voters you represent.
- Provide your address, phone number and email address.

### phone calls, emails, social media and faxes

These 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 emailing, tweeting or faxing, address the lawmaker or aide by name and appropriate title or Twitter handle.
- State that you are from the lawmaker's district.
- Give the bill number and name.
- Explain why the issue is important to your PTA.
- Ask the legislator to vote in your favor.
- If phoning, write down your speaking points in advance.
- If phoning, take notes on what was said.



Visit the NYS PTA Website to sign up and receive alerts about legislation and take action.

“Advocacy is at the heart of PTA’s mission and vision. Taking action provides both parents and PTA leaders with the resources to become more involved with their community at home and their community across the nation.”

For up-to-date information about NYS PTA, check out our social media by clicking on the icons located on our home page



Download the NYS PTA App, powered by Blackboard from:

Google Play  
App Store



## how PTA can help

PTA members can find a list of the key PTA legislative issues contained in New York State PTA's **"Where We Stand"** and **"Legislative Directives"** or in **National PTA's Public Policy Agenda**. These documents establish and guide PTA legislative goals. If the issue is new and PTA does not have a position, there is a process to gain PTA support by generating a resolution. Contact your PTA region director or visit the New York PTA State website at [www.nyspta.org](http://www.nyspta.org) to obtain a copy of "Where We Stand" or the resolution information packet.

New York State PTA has a coordinator of legislation who stays informed on state and federal issues and provides guidance and information to volunteers in the legislation arena. Information is provided on the New York State PTA website, [www.nyspta.org](http://www.nyspta.org) and in a monthly (except in July) e-newsletter entitled "Advocacy Newsbriefs." At the national level, National PTA provides similar information through its website, [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org), and its member-to-member network service.

Annually, New York State PTA selects legislative priorities and develops positions, provides background and suggested actions to support these positions in "Issues Briefs." In late February or early March, New York State PTA hosts a Legislation/Education Conference in Albany that focuses on major legislation and education policy of interest to the PTA. **March is designated Advocacy month** and members are encouraged to advocate locally. An Albany Lobby Day and Virtual Lobby Day are also held in March.



Advocacy training is also available through New York State or region PTA resources. Many PTA regions have local legislation or advocacy chairs and host legislative events that permit direct contact and exchange with local legislators on critical issues.

New York State PTA represents **hundreds of thousands of members across the state, and National PTA has nearly 5 million members**. This membership base, coupled with coalition partners, provides leverage for lobbying efforts. New York State PTA works with other partners as a lobbying coalition and as a resource for information. Local PTAs often form coalitions with local groups.

### Albany politics explained

- To get a law passed requires a bill to be introduced in the Assembly and a corresponding bill to be introduced in the Senate. Therefore, the best chance for bills to become law is to have the bill introduced by the controlling party in each house.
- Most bills go through committees before they are

formally introduced on the floor for general discussion and adoption.

- Bills in the Senate and Assembly on the same topic may still require reconciliation and often compromise before they can become a law.
- Once a bill is introduced, there are key players that need to be influenced by public opinion. These include the makers of the bills, the relevant Committee Chair, the Speaker of the Assembly and the Majority Leader in the Senate.
- If a bill is not passed in a legislative session, it will need to be reintroduced in the next session to be considered.

Often it will take many years and several reintroductions before a bill is passed. When a bill is under consideration by the general body of the Senate or Assembly there is usually a limited window of opportunity to influence lawmakers, and it is critical to have your position understood by previous letters or a phone call, fax or email showing your support.



## how PTA can help, con't.

Once the bills are passed in both houses, there may be final work before the proposed law is forwarded to the Governor for his signature. The Governor has three options when the proposed law is forwarded to him: sign it, veto it or do nothing within the 10-day period after it is submitted. This “do nothing” approach is called a “pocket veto” and kills the law. Therefore, a public show of support may be needed to get the Governor to sign the bill into law.

**A note about lobbying by not-for-profit organizations** – PTAs enjoy a tax-exempt public charity status. Donors to PTA may deduct their contributions to the extent

permitted by law. To maintain this tax-exempt status, PTAs must be nonpartisan and abide by certain lobbying restrictions set forth in Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code. **PTAs cannot ever endorse, support or oppose candidates for any public office, including school boards.**

Activities that are considered “direct lobbying” may account for only an “insubstantial amount” (generally understood as no more than 5 percent) of the total annual expenditures. Direct lobbying includes travel to the state or national capital for specific lobbying purposes, paid advertisements attempting

to sway the general public in support of legislation, the costs of encouraging public support for a specific position, and other activities whose purpose is to convince or influence.

Information sharing is not direct lobbying as long as it informs of legislative issues and positions, even stating the expected local impact of proposed legislation, without urging a particular stand or advocating a specific vote. Inviting legislators to learn about PTA positions is not direct lobbying. Educating about PTA positions, or clarifying the facts about an issue, are not considered lobbying efforts.

## from issue to resolution

Generally, for National PTA or New York State PTA to establish positions related to legislation, resolutions are adopted by voting delegates during the respective PTA’s convention. For New York State PTA, resolutions remain part of “Where We Stand” until they become law or are shown to be no longer needed.

### what is a resolution?

A resolution is a main motion and is a statement of a desired action that will solve a problem. Resolutions address issues upon which NYS PTA has not previously taken a stand. When a resolution is proposed, the need or reasons for the motion are explained in clauses summarizing the research. These are referred to as the “whereas” clauses and provide the rationale. Clauses that refer to the desired action PTA would like taken are referred as the “resolved” clauses. The resolution is submitted to New York State PTA by April 15

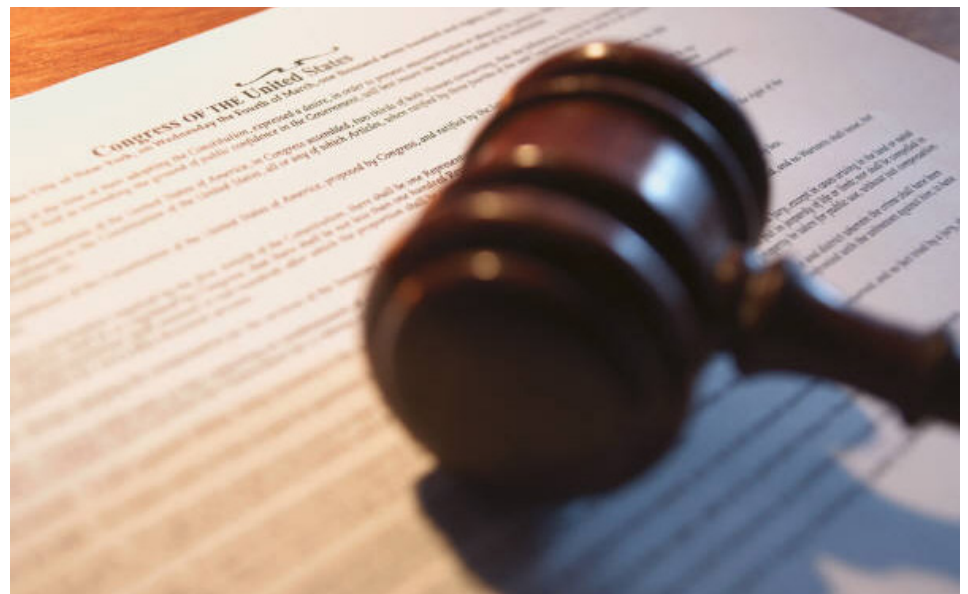
and reviewed by the resolutions committee to determine if it is appropriate.

PTA positions in “Where We Stand” are arrived at in a democratic fashion unique among associations. Resolutions are submitted by units, councils, PTA regions or the state PTA

and are voted upon at the annual convention.

Every PTA is sent the details of any newly proposed, updated or retained resolutions in the convention mailing sent to each president in early autumn. Unit, council and region PTAs should

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## from issue to resolution, con't.

discuss these resolutions and vote whether or not to support them, thus directing the people representing them at convention how to vote.

Once passed by delegates attending the convention, the resolutions become part of the legislative program of New York State PTA. This allows all units, councils and PTA regions to advocate on the issue.

Once a position is established, it is expected that all PTAs will support the decision of the majority. PTAs that do not support a position may refrain from acting in support of that position. It is expected, however, that they will not act in opposition to a PTA position, especially not publicly.

From time to time, the New York State PTA Board of Directors adopts a position on an issue and publishes a paper on the subject. Position papers represent the research of the Board of Directors and are included in “Where We Stand”.

The “Basic Policy” of New York State PTA, which is based on our positions in “Where We Stand”, guides all PTA advocacy goals. It is reviewed annually.

### going from issue to resolution

Is there an issue in your school community that concerns the health, safety, education or well-being of children and youth? Has your unit, council or PTA region been studying this issue in a committee? Have you found that there is no remedy or solution to the problem that the issue highlights? Is the issue really important? Is it consistent with PTA principles, policies, position

statements and basic policies? If the PTA would like to take action, it will vote to adopt a local resolution – a motion that describes the action.

Issues that affect only the local PTA area can be studied, and a local resolution can be adopted by that particular PTA. In this instance, the PTA forms a committee, studies the issue, determines the action plan, and brings that plan to the local PTA which must adopt the resolution, amend and then adopt it, or defeat it. The committee’s recommendation is the motion, or ‘resolution’. Once adopted, the local PTA can advocate on that issue to their local school board or representatives, planning an advocacy campaign that is also approved by the membership. Don’t hesitate to ask for advice from your assistant or associate director, PTA region director, or PTA region legislation or resolutions chair.

An issue that could affect children and youth across New York State is appropriate to submit to the New York State PTA resolutions committee. To learn how to do so, contact the New York State PTA resolutions coordinator through the state office at:

**New York State PTA  
One Wembley Court  
Albany, NY 12205  
1-877-569-7782**

What happens at convention is a result of the grassroots efforts of units, councils, PTA regions and PTA members from across the state. **To experience the discussion and participate in the decision making, you must be at Convention!**

## what is a...

### resolution?

A statement on an issue, concern or problem that:

- Establishes an official PTA position
- Formalizes a research-based position
- Proposes action in the form of an original main motion
- Comes before convention delegates for their consideration and adoption
- Upon adoption, becomes part of NYS PTA’s “Where We Stand”

### position paper?

An in-depth statement on an issue that:

- Establishes an official PTA position
- Formalizes a research-based position
- Is adopted by NYS PTA Board of Directors
- Provides guidance for understanding an issue
- Upon adoption, becomes part of NYS PTA’s “Where We Stand”

### statement of concern?

A written statement made by one or more PTA members that:

- Expresses concern not in existing PTA policy
- Reflects opinion of the originators (not PTA position)
- Should identify originators
- If submitted at Convention: has two-minute time limit, copy to Secretary, attached to Convention minutes
- Raises awareness of new issue/need
- Should have factual support
- Can evolve into a resolution



## March is PTA advocacy month

There are many ways PTA members can become involved in advocacy. In late February or early March, New York State PTA offers the annual Legislation/Education Conference, providing current information on hot topics and long-standing issues. Members of local units, councils and regions who attend this conference can bring a wealth of information back to their PTA and school community. They may also become trained as Key or Local Advocacy Partners prepared to promote advocacy in their region or local PTA and to participate in NYS PTA Lobby Day in Albany.

During March, legislative committees and local PTA leaders are also urged to encourage PTA members to identify the activities they may participate in as advocates. These can include:

- Attending a parent teacher conference
- Attending a school board meeting
- Visiting a PTA website
- Reading a PTA magazine
- Researching a PTA issue and sharing the information at a PTA meeting
- Emailing, writing, faxing, tweeting, phoning and/or visiting your legislator(s) about an issue
- Attending a PTA program
- Writing an article for the PTA newsletter
- Telephoning your local legislator about a PTA issue
- Duplicating and sharing the information on legislation and advocacy mailed to the unit president in February
- Creating a local advocacy activity

## legislation chair and legislative committees

**Refer to Section 3, The PTA Board, and Section 4, The Council Guide**

The **unit legislative committee** should include the president and the unit chairs of education, environment, health, safety, juvenile protection, special education, family engagement, and publicity, as well as other members with the desire and time to devote to PTA.

A **council committee** should also include at least one representative from each member unit.

A **region PTA legislative committee** should include the region director and all of the issue-related chairmen, as well as other region PTA board members with the desire and time to devote to the committee.

These committees are chaired by the legislation chair who should endeavor to:

- Ensure that the budget includes funds to cover attendance at the Legislation/Education Conference and other related conferences and trainings, especially those offered by the region PTA.
- Ensure that members of the committee attend these conferences, trainings and the New York State PTA Convention.
- Receive *Our Children (OC)*, *New York Parent Teacher*,

“Advocacy Newsbriefs...” and National PTA and New York State PTA’s electronic advocacy tool, Engage.

- Determine, with the committee, the goals for the year.
- Communicate with school administrators throughout the year.
- Be knowledgeable about the National PTA and New York State PTA’s current legislative program, directives and positions and be familiar with New York State PTA’s “Basic Policy” and “Where We Stand”.
- Be knowledgeable about proposed legislation and regulatory issues that affect the health, education, safety and welfare of children and youth and what, if any, positions National and/or New York State PTA may have pertaining to such current issues.
- Cultivate relationships with local legislators and their aides.

In addition, the region PTA legislation chair should endeavor to remain in contact with the unit and council legislation chairmen and provide them with current information when received from National and New York State PTAs. The unit and council chairmen should also maintain ongoing communication with the region PTA.

Understanding the importance of many types of advocacy efforts is part of PTA leadership. It is also important to remember that PTA is an association of volunteers. Keep this in mind when planning goals for the year – undertake only those you know are doable in your unit, council or region PTA. While it is necessary to involve members in the issues that concern them, remember not to overwhelm them or overburden them. It is the combined efforts of all the members, units, councils, regions and states that have made PTA the credible force it is recognized as today.



# PTA and school board elections

PTA is a not-for-profit corporation with a tax exemption under IRS rules, which states that such organizations may not make written or oral statements for or against candidates for public office.

PTA is nonpartisan, which means **PTA cannot support or oppose candidates, including those running for school boards.** Any group activity in support of a specific candidate on the part of a unit, council, district or state PTA is a violation of this nonpartisan policy and of PTA bylaws.

### **PTA can take a stand on issues.**

Although PTA cannot support individuals, it can be concerned with issues, proposals or plans of action. A PTA not only may, but perhaps should, adopt positions expressing support for, or opposition to, issues dealing with the health, safety, education or general well-being of children and youth.

In order to retain federal tax-exempt status, PTA cannot concern itself with parties or persons, and, if necessary, should make a public statement explaining the reasons for not endorsing candidates.

Although PTA cannot endorse a candidate, individuals may do so on an individual basis without using their PTA titles or affiliation. Officers should realize, however, that active campaigning for or against a candidate for public office would probably be viewed as a PTA endorsement.

PTA leaders and active, visible PTA members would be well-

advised to postpone partisan political activity while serving in positions of PTA leadership.

However, PTA leaders who choose to run for public office may list their PTA service, but may not imply PTA endorsement in any advertising. Similarly, PTA leaders supporting candidates may not use their PTA titles or affiliation in any ads or fliers on behalf of a candidate.

### **what PTAs can do:**

- Publish and distribute a list of qualifications for school board members.
- Publicize the filing date for candidate petitions.
- Compile and distribute a brochure or flier with candidates' biographies. Include verbatim responses to questions asked of all candidates.
- Sponsor a well-publicized district-wide meeting to which all candidates are invited to present their views and to respond to questions. (A Candidates' Forum is an ideal PTA council project.)
- Organize a campaign to

get everyone registered and voting. Use newsletters, fliers, telephone calls, car pools, etc.

- Instruct volunteers to avoid voicing personal preferences when working in the name of PTA.

### **what PTAs cannot do:**

According to PTA bylaws, "The association shall not directly or indirectly participate or intervene in any way (including the publishing or distribution of statements), in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office."

### **a PTA Solution – candidates' forums**

PTAs can perform a vital service by arranging and conducting candidates' forums to assist the community in making an informed judgment in the election of its board of education. Forums are usually held one to two weeks before the election date.

### **suggested guidelines suggested guidelines for pre-forum arrangements**

- Publicize the date as early in the school year as possible (school district calendar, PTA calendar and newsletter).
- Immediately after the filing date, send all board of education candidates, who have filed a valid petition and met the legal requirements to be placed on the school ballot, an invitation to participate in the forum.
- List date, place and time of forum.
- Request a reply or include a response form on which the candidate can indicate if he/she plans to attend the forum.



## PTA and school board elections, con't.

- Send by certified mail with return receipt requested.
- Include a copy of the format to be used that evening.
- Indicate that candidates are expected to meet with the moderator fifteen (15) minutes before the forum to review the format.
- Inform candidates that written statements by candidates who cannot attend the forum will not be read.
- Inform candidates that no campaign literature can be distributed at the forum.
- If a candidate has not responded by a specific date, make a follow-up call to be sure the candidate received the invitation.

### the moderator

Some region PTAs provide board members to serve as moderators and timekeepers. Contact your assistant or associate director (AD), who will arrange for this service and assist you with the format if desired.

However, if a PTA board member is a candidate, it is advisable to contact another group such as the League of Women Voters or the American Association of University Women.

*It's Your School!*

**SCHOOL  
BOARD  
ELECTION  
INTO**



### suggested format for candidates' forums

*(Adapt to the needs of your community.)*

Moderator meets with all candidates 15 minutes before the forum to:

- Introduce the timekeeper, who will use a stopwatch and signal at specific intervals.
- Agree upon the order of the candidates' presentations and summation (by lot or alphabetical).

Review time frame:

- Opening statement should not exceed \_\_\_ minutes (suggested time: three-five minutes, depending on the number of candidates).
- Response to each question should not exceed \_\_\_ minutes (suggested time: one minute).
- Summation should not exceed \_\_\_ minutes (suggested time: two minutes).
- Time for last question (suggested time: 10:00 p.m.).

### review method of questioning

- If written, indicate that cards will be distributed and collected by ushers.
- Determine who will screen written questions.
- If oral, questioner must be recognized by moderator before speaking.
- Inform candidates that no debating will be allowed by candidates or audience.

The moderator shall:

- Have sole jurisdiction over the proceedings.

## MEET THE CANDIDATES NIGHT



- Introduce candidates and timekeeper to the audience.
- Explain the rules and format agreed upon by all candidates.

Indicate that:

- Written statements by absent candidates will not be read.
- Each candidate will have an opportunity to respond to each question if desired.
- No campaign material will be distributed at the forum.
- Adjourn the forum at the agreed upon time.

### sample questions for school board candidates

- What is your educational philosophy?
- What are your educational priorities for the school district/library?
- Do you approve of public funds being used for private education K-12? Explain.

During times of fiscal constraint:

- What programs would you consider essential to keep in order to maintain the current level of education in your district?
- Where might you consolidate?
- What do you feel you can contribute as a member of the school board/library board?
- How do you feel about involvement in areas such as Shared Decision Making, volunteering in the classroom, communication between the home and school?

*continued on page 12*

## PTA and school board elections, con't.

- Do you believe extracurricular activities are necessary?
- Do you feel that subjects such as music, art, physical, education, technology and foreign languages play an important part in a child's education? Explain.
- Do you support the district's proposed school/library budget? Explain.

Forums are usually held one to two weeks before the election date.

### suggested qualifications for school board candidates

Membership on a board of education should be broad and diverse, reflecting various points of view within the community. Only citizens deeply concerned with educational standards and school needs should be elected or appointed to school boards.

A school board member should:

- Be a supporter of public education.
  - Have a broad background of knowledge and experience and be willing to learn.
  - Represent the interests of the community at large.
  - Make the welfare of children and community the basis of decisions; be free from partisan politics.
  - Accept the will of the majority; be tolerant and free from prejudice.
  - Understand that education today, like the world it reflects, is extremely complex.
  - Be familiar with the schools in the district and with current educational issues.
- Understand the functions, policies and responsibilities of board members and the administrators.
  - Communicate effectively with professional staff, community groups and others.
  - Realize that an investment of time, effort, study and workshop attendance is essential for a successful performance.
  - Be able to defend the philosophy and goals of the school board and withstand criticism that will inevitably come from people of opposing views.
  - Listen for real consensus and not confuse a few noisy voices with a majority feeling.
  - Above all, board members should be able to learn and grow in competence as they become more aware of the nature of their responsibilities as members of one of the most important elective bodies in our society.



**PTAs can host candidates' forums, making sure they are moderated impartially.**

**PTA can publish an impartial compilation of biographies of all candidates.**



# sample candidate for school board biography

(adapt to the needs of your community)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Home phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you been a resident in the \_\_\_{school name}\_\_\_ district? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have children currently attending school in the public {school name} district? If so, how many are enrolled?

- \_\_\_\_\_ {school name} elementary
- \_\_\_\_\_ {school name} high school
- \_\_\_\_\_ not in school yet
- \_\_\_\_\_ {school name} middle/junior
- \_\_\_\_\_ {school name} high school graduates

Education: List names of schools/colleges attended as well as degree(s) received:

School/College Name	Degree	Year

Professional/Business/Personal experience and/or expertise: (Include at least the past five years)

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Community Activities:

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NOTE: Please type answers, single-spaced directly under the question, using the space provided.

## sample candidates' forum invitation

*Use PTA letterhead.*

Date

Dear (Candidate's Name):

You are cordially invited to participate in a Candidates' Forum on (date) at (place) at (time). Enclosed is a copy of the format for the evening.

Each year, the (school district name) Council of PTAs holds a Candidates' Forum and prints information submitted by school board and library board candidates. The council does this as a public service to the community because it believes that informed citizens are responsive citizens who will strive for better schools and a better community.

Please complete the enclosed form and return by (date) to (name and address). Your answers to the questions will be printed verbatim. Brief answers are appreciated.

The information received will be distributed to the community through (mailed to residents, mailed to parents, copies available at PTA meetings, the library, or distributed at the Candidates' Forum).

Candidates are expected to meet with the moderator 15 minutes before the forum begins to review the format. Written statements by candidates who cannot attend the forum will not be read. No campaign literature can be distributed at the forum.

Sincerely,

Name  
Council President

RSVP by (date)

Enclosure

*(Letter to be sent certified mail to all candidates who have filed for a school board or library board seat.)*

**New York State**  
**PTA**<sup>®</sup>  
*everychild.onevoice.*<sup>®</sup>

## PTA and school budgets

One of the most important tasks facing a school board is the preparation of the annual school budget. **A school budget is a statement of the school board's financial policy** – the fiscal plan for the operation of the school district for the year.

The proposed budget, as submitted to the residents for a vote, is the legal responsibility of the school board. Knowing this, it is still important for the PTA to have input as early as possible in the budget process. It is critical that the PTA take the time to become well informed and work constructively with the school board and superintendent to ensure that their opinions are known.

It is the PTA's responsibility to promote an understanding of the education needs of the community and to demonstrate how the proposed budget meets those needs.

### the PTA should:

- Be knowledgeable about school financial information year-round. Institute regular procedures for sharing this information with unit representatives. Participate in school budget advisory committees.
- Be continuously involved in decision-making related to the school district budget. Respond to items under consideration during the designated public comment times at regular school board meetings and special budget hearings or discussions (which are subject to open meeting laws).
- Encourage school board members and the superintendent to attend unit and council meetings to discuss the school

- district's financial status, proposed bond issues, etc.
- Provide opportunities for formal debate or forums for discussion. (Remember to structure these meetings with ground rules for conducting business in an orderly fashion.)
- Make certain that all sides and all opinions are discussed so that an informed community can make the best decision.
- Be wary of influences and arguments that are based on emotional appeals.
- Disseminate information to parents and community members so that all may be informed.
- Call all parents on the day of the vote as a reminder. Arrange for transportation and baby-sitting, if possible.



## PTA and school budget committees

In the pursuit of a good understanding of the budget process, PTA should have involvement on a budget committee. There are two kinds of committees which often come up: a PTA's own budget study committee and the school board's community budget committee.

### PTA budget committee

The purpose of a PTA budget committee is to study the budget and present the committee's ideas and recommendations to the membership. The benefit of such a committee is the opportunity to include more people in the budget process.

A **unit committee** should include a broad representation of the PTA members living in the school community.

A **council committee** should include representation from all units in its membership.

### school board or community budget advisory committees

These committees are usually formed by the school board to garner input from the community during the budget process. PTA should make sure to have representatives on this committee who will report back to the PTA regularly.

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## PTA and school budget committees, con't.

### resources for the budget committee:

- Board of Education's time schedule for finalizing proposed budget to assure input in adequate time
- Budgetary requests for capital equipment and buildings and ground maintenance/improvements
- Commissioner of Education's regulations
- *School Law: A Handbook for School Board Members*, New York State School Boards Association, 24 Century Hill Dr., Suite 200, Latham, NY 12110-2125; also available in the school superintendent's office and at the public library
- Previous, present and proposed line-by-line budgets
- Pupil projections/class size
- Supplemental budget information used by school board in preparing budget
- Resource people: superintendent, business manager, principal
- Contingent Budget: Districts operating under contingent budgets are subject to special restrictions on expenditures

**PTA should participate in the creation of the school district budget at the very beginning of the process.**

**PTA meetings can serve as forums for information and community input.**



## analysis of the school budget

PTAs should help advocate for parent training to understand the important factors in analyzing school budgets, such as:

- Inflation results in increased costs just to maintain current level of operation
- Utility and maintenance expenses – are they cost effective?
- Curriculum relevancy
- Current tax base
- Building and equipment maintenance – repair vs. replacement
- Declining/increasing enrollment effect on class size, utilization of classrooms/buildings, and redistricting
- Class size ratio
- Ratio of instructional to non-instructional staff
- Investment policies
- Impact of budget on programs and services
- Encumbered and unencumbered fund balance
- Impact of state aid
- Impact of school contracts

When educating the public, it is important to provide as many opportunities as possible for them to hear the facts and ask questions.

At times, despite supporters' best efforts, a budget is defeated.

### why budgets are defeated:

Awareness of these factors before you start the budget process may help you in your efforts to educate the public:

- Increased taxes or tax increase out of line with surrounding communities
- Inadequate state aid
- Increased state mandates without financial support
- Residents without children in public schools
- People on fixed incomes
- Voter apathy
- Inflation and recession
- Salary and benefit increases of all school employees
- Lack of community understanding of budget
- Influence of tax PACs and media on community
- Non-budget issues that have divided the community or school board

# PTA takes a position on the school budget

After careful review and consideration of the proposed budget, the PTA may take a position to:

- Support
- Educate about, or
- Oppose

In order for a unit to take a position on a proposed budget in the name of the unit, a vote of its general membership must be taken. A special meeting may be called if necessary.

In order for a council to take a position on the budget in the name of the council, an instructed vote is required. Each unit's general membership takes a vote, and each unit then has one vote on the council. Dissenting units may request that their vote be listed as such.

If only the voting body of a council takes a position, it must be clearly stated that the position is that of the voting body of council and not the council as a whole.

If only the executive board of a council or unit votes to take a position, it must be clearly noted in any letters, publicity, etc., which body has taken this position.

The proposed budget need not contain all of PTA's priorities for it to be supported. A statement of PTA's concerns can inform the board of education of those aspects of the budget with which it does not concur.

*Be aware that opposing a budget for insufficient funds and/or educational programs may be misinterpreted and encourage the board of education to reduce the amount of the proposed budget. A defeated budget will usually lead to an even less adequate budget. Opposition can produce just the*

*opposite of what the PTA was trying to do.*

## units and councils take a position

PTA's position on the proposed budget and any statements of concern should be publicized in newsletters, local newspapers, and fliers to parents and other community members. It is important to include an explanation when publicizing PTA's position.

**Remember:** In accordance with state education law, fliers or newsletters announcing the date of the school budget and encouraging people to vote may be sent home with the children. **However, the school board and staff are not permitted by laws to use public funds to urge a "yes" vote on the budget.**

If a PTA wishes to encourage a "yes" vote, the PTA:

- Must pay privately to copy fliers or newsletters publicizing its position. It may not use school copy machines or paper.
- Must mail that pro-budget information to parents at PTA expense. It may not have the school send fliers home with the children.
- Must use PTA phones to communicate their position to people via a phone chain. They may not use school phones.
- May organize a community-wide coalition to produce a positive vote. Include representation from such community and school organizations as booster clubs, scouts, the Chamber of Commerce and community recreation or service organizations.
- May strategize ways to target the audience, which will be

the most sympathetic to the budget – the "yes" vote. This audience encompasses parents of preschool-age children, as well as those of older children

## the budget

- 1) The **universal date** required by state law, for the board of education's annual meeting, the school board election, and the budget vote is the **third Tuesday in May**.
- 2) A budget hearing is required not less than seven (7) days, or more than 14 days, prior to the annual meeting and budget vote.
- 3) A budget statement must be completed at least seven (7) days before the budget hearing.
- 4) All school districts are required to present the budget in three parts:
  - Administrative
  - Program
  - Capital

### Upon defeat of the original budget, a district may:

- Resubmit the original budget for a revote
- Submit a revised budget
- Adopt a contingent budget

Only **one revote** is allowed. The universal date for that revote is **the third Tuesday in June**.

If the budget is defeated again, **districts revert to a contingent budget, which now means a zero increase over the prior year's school tax levy.**

In 2011, the New York State Legislature enacted Chapter 97 of the Laws of 2011 (generally referred to as the "tax cap"). This law affects all local governments

*continued on page 18*

# notes

## the budget, con't.

and school districts in New York State, *except* New York City and the other “Big Five” city school districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers).

Under this law, the property taxes levied by affected local governments and school districts generally cannot increase by more than 2 percent, or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower. However, the law does allow local governments and school districts to levy an additional amount for certain **excludable** expenditures. An override of the levy limit is permitted.

School districts are required to submit a budget to the voters by the third Tuesday in May. If the proposed tax levy is within the 2 percent, then a majority vote would be required for approval. **If the proposed tax levy exceeds the statutory limit, then the vote required for approval would be 60 percent of the vote cast.**

If that budget is defeated, the school district can resubmit the original budget or a revised budget. If the resubmitted budget is defeated, the district must adopt a final budget with a tax levy that is no greater than the levy of the prior year.