

INTRODUCTION

Actions of legislative bodies often have a profound effect on the education and welfare of children and youth. These actions may be influenced by a strong position on legislative matters. Grassroots involvement with dedicated commitment is the key to successful implementation of the Texas PTA legislative positions.

“Grassroots” is defined as the common people at a local level (as distinguished from the centers of political activity), or involving the common people. PTA is a grassroots association comprised of individuals and groups concerned with the health, safety, well-being and education of children and youth.

Successful implementation of the legislative positions is characterized by people working together to assure wise legislative decisions through knowledge of the legislative process and through an understanding of the issues at stake. It is the purpose of the Legislative Action Committee to provide the membership with the information necessary for these two characteristics.

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ABOUT PTA

VISION

Every child's potential is a reality.

MISSION

To make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

PURPOSES

- To promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, community and place of worship.
- To raise the standards of home life.
- To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth.
- To bring into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth.
- To develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, social and spiritual education.

PTA VALUES

- **Collaboration:** We will work in partnership with a wide array of individuals and organizations to broaden and enhance our ability to serve and advocate for all children and families.
- **Commitment:** We are dedicated to children's educational success, health, and well-being through strong family and community engagement, while remaining accountable to the principles upon which our association was founded.
- **Diversity:** We acknowledge the potential of everyone without regard, including but not limited to: age, culture, economic status, educational background, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, legal status, marital status, mental ability, national origin, organizational position, parental status, physical ability, political philosophy, race, religion, sexual orientation, and work experience.
- **Respect:** We value the individual contributions of members, employees, volunteers, and partners as we work collaboratively to achieve our association's goals.
- **Accountability:** All members, employees, volunteers, and partners have a shared responsibility to align their efforts toward the achievement of our association's strategic initiatives.

PLAN OF WORK

At the beginning of each term all board members are required per the bylaws to complete and present a Plan of Work to the board for approval.

A Plan of Work is a detail list of all goals and expenses that a board member has for their term of office. Plans of Work must be approved before any expenses can be incurred for a position.



Plan of Work Plan de Trabajo

Officer/Chairman Name:

(Nombre de Oficial/Presidente de Junta) _____

Position:

(Posición) _____

Year:

(Año) _____

Reproduce as needed for the appropriate number of goals.

(Se puede reproducir para metas adicionales.)

Responsibilities/- Duties: (Responsabilidades)		Committee Members: (Miembros del Comité)	
Goal: (Meta)		Evaluation Process: (Proceso de Evaluación)	

Specific Action Steps (Proceso Especifico de Acción)	Start Date (Fecha de Empezio)	Completion Date (Fecha de Terminación)	Budget (Presupuesto)

Resources: (Recursos)	
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POSITION RESPONSIBILITIES

Chair Responsibilities

- Attend training.
- Determine the goals to be attained this year. Present a Plan of Work to the executive board for approval.
- Maintain a procedure book, which includes information on activities, programs, contacts, communications, statistics and budget information.
- Communicating and sharing important information is vital to the duties of this position, so it is necessary to know where to get the information.
- Stay informed. Take advantage of all the information National and Texas PTA have to offer:
- **OC** (*Our Children*), National PTA publication, sent to each Local PTA president and available online.
- **The Voice**, the quarterly online publication of Texas PTA that includes important legislative information to share with your members.
- **Under the Dome**, a monthly (when needed) e-mail publication that includes legislative information, alerts, and calls for action; sent to all members who have signed up for receipt.
- Keep members aware of the legislative process.
- Keep members informed of pending legislative action.
- Involve members and other appropriate persons in the legislative process.
- Be prepared with dates of school board elections, bond elections, general elections, Texas PTA Rally Day, etc. The local League of Women Voters may have extra Voters Guides for distribution to PTA members.
- Keep members well informed about the happenings in the community that will affect them. Attend local school board meetings and provide reports to your board and membership. Be aware of the State Board of Education (SBOE) meetings, decisions, and plans and report this to your members.
- Request that one PTA program during the year concern legislation. Have a panel comprised of school board members; state legislators, county commissioners and city council members (or any combination of these) to discuss various topics. Timely topics could be child abuse prevention, the role of the local school board, or the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) and how it affects school health policy.
- Know whom to contact for help or information. City and county officials, legislators and school board members can give invaluable aid when there is a problem to solve or in making contact to have changes made. Make a list of addresses, telephone numbers and titles of all these people to keep handy for reference. PTA members may request this information. Include the names, addresses and telephone numbers of these people in the PTA newsletter, which is distributed to the members.
- Volunteer to be a part of the PTA Legislative Action subcommittee or participate in a position focus group. Alerts are e-mailed when letters or telephone calls about key legislative items need to be sent to those elected officials. Being a member of the Legislative Action Team and PTA Takes Action Network is “grassroots” involvement.
- Keep in mind that the interest and enthusiasm expressed in the job will help create an atmosphere that is meaningful and maximizes willingness and cooperation from the association.
- Pass procedure book to successor.
- Train for the future. Mentor others to help ensure continuity, and the effectiveness of the association.

TIMELINE

August

- Training is your best guide. Complete the Texas PTA Leader Orientation course and attend training offered by your Council and Texas PTAs. As the Legislative Action Chair, training during Summer Leadership Seminar in Austin or workshops presented during Family Engagement Conference is recommended.
- Develop your plan for the year and consider an advocacy project.
- Familiarize yourself with Texas PTA legislative positions/resolutions listed on the Texas PTA website.
- Check for items of business or issues that may affect school, children and youth, community health and safety, etc., for legislative advocacy project.
- Sign up for National and Texas PTA e-mail information and alerts at www.pta.org/takeaction and www.txpta.org.
- Pick up voter registration cards for Back to School Night, Meet the Teacher, and have them available at PTA general meetings and events (Texas Secretary of State Office or visit: www.sos.state.tx.us/elections).

September

- Submit resolutions/positions to be considered at Texas PTA Annual Meeting to the state office if your PTA has been working on this during the year. Deadlines for submission of positions and resolutions are April 30 and September 1. Visit the Texas PTA website for more information.
- Attend local school board meetings. Inform PTA about pending Local, state and national concerns on educational and child-related issues.

October — December

- Present reports monthly of national, state and local legislative concerns and status of bills.
- Participate in letter writing, telephone calls, and visits to congressmen, legislators, State Board of Education officials and local officials.
- If the legislative session is to begin in January (normally in odd-numbered years with exception of a special-called session), make arrangements to attend and rally members to attend Texas PTA Rally Day.

January – May (When Texas Legislature is in session)

- Keep informed on legislative items that pertain to Texas PTA legislative positions, resolutions and priorities and all items pertaining to the education and welfare of youth.
- Participate in networking among PTA membership and legislators.
- Check Texas PTA website and monitor alerts regularly for updates.

February-March

- Attend Texas PTA Rally Day in Austin (odd-numbered years only).
- Attend the Texas PTA Family Engagement Conference (even-numbered years only).
- Visit your senator and representative, and present PTA priorities and concerns.
- Upon return, be prepared to present a report on Texas PTA legislative positions and resolutions as adopted.

April-May

- April 30, submit legislative position or resolution for consideration and review by Texas PTA Advocacy Committee.

July

- Attend Texas PTA Summer Leadership Seminar. Attend workshops pertinent to your position and interests.

POLICIES

Nonpartisan — PTA takes a stand on issues and principles — not on candidates or political parties. Issues may become identified with partisan politics because of the differing approaches to the solution, but the basic principles involving the welfare of children and youths are matters of public concern and, therefore, PTA business.

Legislation For All Children — PTA supports legislation that will raise the level of opportunity for all children, regardless of race, creed, or other differences.

Educational — Study must precede action; it is the initial step in any parent-teacher program. An informed public opinion on issues and conditions affecting the education and welfare of children and young people is essential for producing desired results.

Local PTA Support — A Local PTA may decide to give active support to any or all items on the adopted legislative positions, resolutions or priorities. It should not, however, in the name of PTA, oppose items that have been adopted at the annual state convention.

Democratic Action — The Texas PTA will support only such state legislation as has been endorsed by the Texas PTA delegate body at state convention, in principle or in fact. Texas PTA will support national legislative programs adopted by National PTA by virtue of the state's affiliation with the national association.

Local Issues — A PTA can and often should take local action. As an association, it may act on local issues if they affect the education, health or welfare of children and youth. In all such issues, the above-mentioned policies should be observed.

School Board Elections — Leadership on local boards of education is of vital interest to all PTA members. To help the people of the community ascertain the qualifications of the candidates for the school board, a Local or Council PTA may participate in, initiate or sponsor a public meeting for this purpose. All community groups should be invited to send representatives to the meeting so that qualifications of each candidate may be thoroughly discussed and widely publicized.

If PTA members wish to acquaint themselves further with qualifications of candidates, a group of PTAs in a geographic area may hold a joint meeting and invite candidates to present their views. A Council PTA may invite the candidates to a meeting for this purpose. It is essential, however, that all candidates be asked to speak in order to avoid even the appearance of partisanship or discrimination.

PTA Do's and Don'ts

- Do Voter Registration...If nonpartisan
- Do Voter Education...If nonpartisan
- Do Voter Participation...If nonpartisan
- Do Advocacy Activities...if nonpartisan
- Do Seek legal advice if you have any questions or concerns.
- Don't Endorse (or favor) a particular candidate or party
- Don't Oppose (or slight) a candidate or political party
- Don't Use nonprofit resources, contact lists, coordination of activities etc., for or against any candidate.
- Don't Use an election communication explicitly designed to favor or oppose a candidate, or political party.
- Don't Try to lobby without knowing your state lobbying rules!

WORKING WITH SCHOOL BOARDS

The School Board

- Is elected to serve the patrons of the school district.
- Is a seven-member board, with a few exceptions.
- Watches over the multi-million dollar investments and business of the schools.
- Hires a school superintendent and holds him responsible for the schools.
- Sets policy for the school district.
- Serves without pay.

The PTA

- Is a voluntary service association committed to the welfare of children and youth.
- Is available for curriculum studies, citizen advisory committees, building surveys and dissemination of information.
- Is eager to participate in the decision-making process in a rational and considered method that will be of assistance to the school board and administrator.
- Should be represented at all school board meetings as an observer.

Much can be accomplished if PTA and the school board work together cooperatively.

A PTA Should...

- Attend school board meetings to be informed.
- Know the policies of the school district.
- Be placed on the agenda if the PTA representative wishes to speak on behalf of the unit. There are prescribed ways this may be done, according to the district.
- Request information or an explanation regarding any phase of school curriculum or school practice.
- Undertake a study or survey on any phase of school work, if necessary.
- Present results of studies or surveys to the administration and the school board to indicate how the patrons feel on an issue or item.
- Make a recommendation for action to the school board when the study is complete **and its members have voted to support the request.**
- Present both pro and con of every issue before making a decision.
- Disseminate information to the patrons of the district, especially Texas Education Code Chapter 26, Parental Rights.
- Know the members of the school board and invite them to PTA meetings.
- Act rationally and with decorum should the school board disagree with the request asked for by the PTA. This does not mean the PTA should give up if their membership still supports the request. Persistence and repeated pressures are indicated but cooperation need not be lost during the negotiation of an issue. Dignity and determination will pay off for the children and youths; and the PTA will gain respect from the school board.

Because of their training and background in education issues, many PTA members make good school board members. This is encouraged, but the PTA should not be used to gain election. Individual members of the PTA may work for the candidate of their choice.

CONTACTING LEGISLATORS

Texas PTA Advocacy Committee identifies the legislative priority issues and presents them to the Texas PTA Board of Directors. Once the issues are identified, presented, and adopted by the Board of Directors, PTAs are asked to support these efforts.

I. Planning Your Contact

- A. Make a personal visit, if possible. Arrange an appointment with either your elected official or one of his top staff persons. State the nature of the issue you are concerned about when you call for an appointment.
- B. If you cannot make a personal visit, write a letter. Deal with only one subject/issue in the letter, and limit the letter to one page, if possible.
- C. Whether you plan a personal visit or a letter, you should plan to provide your elected official with a very brief summary of the issue you plan to discuss with him. This should be attached to your letter or used as your agenda during your personal visit. You should plan to leave them with a copy of it for future reference. You should cover the following types of information in your summary:

WHO: Who is concerned about the issue? Mention types of constituents, other public officials, etc.

WHAT: What is the issue, the legislation addressing it and your position on both? (Note: If possible, provide the number of the bill and amendments, as well as the subject matter. For example, say that “HR 3434 is a bill addressing the child welfare amendments to the Social Security Act; it is also seeking to raise the ceiling on federal funds for social services...”)

WHEN: When will the issue need their attention? For example, tell them when the next hearing on the issue is or when they will be asked to vote on the issue.

WHERE: Where will the hearing or vote on the issue be held? For example, will the hearing be a subcommittee hearing and, if so, where will it be held? Or, if it is to be voted on soon, will the vote be in subcommittee, full committee or on the floor of the House or Senate?

WHY: Why should the issue concern the official and why should they support your position on the issue? For example, tell them that a certain amount of federal, state or local funds would be saved by the proposal, and/or the quality of care for a certain number and type of their constituents could be improved by the proposal.

HOW: How will the proposal affect the official’s constituents? Also, how will it affect the constituents of other elected officials with whom the representative will share decision-making responsibility on the issue? Use case example of a person or persons who would be helped by the proposal.

II. Making the Contact

- A. Always be courteous, appreciative and express your gratitude to your elected official.
- B. Use the proper salutation when addressing them. (NOTE: See “Correct Salutations to Use When Contacting Elected Officials” section for this information.)
- C. Make every effort to familiarize yourself with his interests and background so you will be able to briefly discuss one of these interests. For example, “As chairman of the Senate Public Education Committee, you are well aware of the need to ...”; “I know of your longstanding interest in... and concern for ...”; etc.

III. Follow-Up After the Contact

- A. Decide what the reaction to your proposal was and whether further work needs to be done to gain his support.
- B. Send your legislator/elected official a thank you note after he takes action, which helps your cause.
- C. Plan who else needs to be contacted and how best to do so.
- D. If you have been acting singly or with a small group of other persons, find out about other persons/groups interested in the issue. Meet with them, share information and resources and discuss possible “coalition” building.

When You Write Your Legislator

Letters are the lifeblood of almost every legislative office. For most lawmakers, they are the only real communication a legislator has with those he represents. It is not enough for him to know who is for or against proposed laws. He also would like to know why this stand was taken if he is to do his job to the best of his ability.

Every letter that reaches a legislator’s desk exemplifies the vitality of one of our most cherished rights — the right of free speech and opinion. Letters vary in their impact, but all of them help to strengthen and humanize the bond between government and citizens, which is so necessary to a proper functioning of democracy.

Legislators welcome letters from people interested in proposals before them. To be most helpful such letters should be short, should clearly state the positions of the writer for or against the proposal and should briefly present the reasons.

Laws have been passed or killed on the basis of a single, well-written letter. . . . One thoughtful, factual well-reasoned letter carries more weight than 100 form letters or printed postcards.

A Dozen Do’s and Dont’s

DO:

1. Know your legislator’s full name. Spell it correctly.
2. Inform yourself about the measure of concern to you. Know what you are talking about. Know your facts!
3. Use plain stationery or personal stationery. If you are writing as the representative of a group, use association stationery. The use of email is fine, but be sure to personalize or add sections that are in your own words if sending a form letter.

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4. Use your own words to express what you trying to get across.
 5. Let the legislator know how a particular measure will affect your locality — his own home district.
 6. Be concise.
 7. Be complete enough to give pertinent reasons and facts.
 8. Be sincere.
 9. Be courteous always.
 10. Clearly identify the bill using the title and number, if possible.
 11. Follow through. Let your legislator know you are watching his record with deep interest.
 12. Write a letter of appreciation whenever your legislator does something that meets your approval.

DON'T:

1. Guess at the spelling of your legislator's name or initials.
2. Guess at facts or base your letters on rumors.
3. Use mimeographed letters or printed postal cards; they give no evidence that you can think for yourself.
4. Use form letters under any circumstances.
5. Limit yourself to generalities.
6. Be wordy.
7. Leave out essential details.
8. Use insincere flattery or flowery terms.
9. Use threats — ever!
10. Get mixed up on the name, the number or the contents of the bill.
11. Write letters/emails of criticism or request only.
12. Forget to write a thank you letter.

This outline is for the information of members who have occasional or frequent contacts with elected officials by attending a session, hearing or other meeting.

Your contact as a PTA member is a continuing contact to build a permanent friendly relationship. The impression of you held by the legislator can affect our current and future program.

SB	Senate Bill
	HB — House Bill
SCR	Senate Concurrent Resolution
	HCR — House Concurrent Resolution
SJR	Senate Joint Resolution
	HJR — House Joint Resolution
SCS	Senate Committee Substitute
	HCS — House Committee Substitute

The difference between joint resolutions, concurrent resolutions and bills are discussed under “Types of Legislation” in the State Government section of this guide. All three are handled the same as far as procedure in the legislature is concerned except that:

- **Joint resolutions** deal with amendments to the State Constitution and do not require the Governor’s signature.
- **Bills** provide for a new law or repeal or amend an existing law.
- **Concurrent resolutions** are an expression of opinion or procedure of the legislature that do not affect the law and do not require the Governor’s signature.

Preparation (before arriving in Austin)

1. Read “How a Bill Becomes a Law.”
2. Learn who the Chair and members of the important committees are. (See legislative committee list.)
3. Know PTA legislative priorities. (Attempt to learn the answers to as many of the following questions as possible.)

NOTE: Texas PTA Governmental Affairs Consultant will meet with you before representing yourself on behalf of Texas PTA to assist you with testimony and procedure.

Purpose

1. To express the position of the PTA on a particular subject in order to influence the legislator’s position.
2. To share information and to obtain information.
3. To express appreciation for a favorable vote or special help.
4. To solidify friendship and respect for the PTA, which will gain future support for our priorities.

Diplomacy

1. Remember that most legislators are sincere, hard-working individuals and are entitled to the respect due an elected official.
2. Know the committees on which your legislator serves and something about his hometown interests.
3. Have in mind the facts on your primary point of discussion.
4. Let your legislator talk fully. Listen appreciatively to all jokes and stories.

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5. Know previous contacts the PTA has had with this legislator and express appreciation for previous assistance given PTA measures.
 6. Know several other measures in which he has had a part and on which you can comment favorably. However, try to avoid spending too much time discussing legislation that is not a PTA concern.
 7. Do not get into an argument. Express appreciation for the opportunity of hearing his point of view.
 8. Remember, you are representing a nonpartisan association.

The Legislator Questions You

1. If you do not have the answer to a question on the subject, admit it, but write the question down and assure him that you will get the answer for him. Be sure to **follow through**.
2. If the legislator asks for PTA support of a measure he is interested in but which is not a part of PTA's position, explain how our resolutions adopted at state and national conventions are used as the basis for our legislative concerns.

REMEMBER: When representing the PTA, you are expressing the PTA point of view even though you, personally, may not agree with the PTA position. We speak as a united voice, for a united cause.

BEST PRACTICES

APPOINT a committee.

KNOW the procedures by which the Texas PTA develops and carries out its legislative program and assist in the development and activation of the program.

USE the National PTA Advocacy Online Toolkit. It has legislative guidelines and suggestions to help you.

STUDY the legislation programs of state and national and familiarize Local PTA members with policies and procedures.

SUGGEST how members can make their contribution.

ATTEND Council Officer and Chair Training and the legislative workshops.

CALL on the Council and Texas PTA chair for help and direction.

SECURE speakers for programs and keep members informed of current legislation.

MAKE certain the members know who your legislators and/or representatives are: local, state and national.

GIVE your members instructions as to how to contact or correspond with your legislators. Provide the information in “Tips on Contacting Your Local, State and Federal Elected Officials” in this guide.

CONTACT your legislator for a copy of a bill of specific interest. Some libraries may maintain a service that allow you to determine the status of a specific piece of legislation.

TALK with your superintendent of schools in an effort to cooperate on educational needs.

TALK with your local teachers’ associations in an effort to cooperate with the legislative committee in reaching mutual legislative goals.

MAKE plans for visits, telephone calls, emails and letters to legislators. Coordinate a motorcade or bus trip to watch your legislators in action and to visit with them on Texas PTA Day at the Capitol.

RESPOND to the Legislative Action Alert calls for action.

PLAN a program of follow-up and appreciation to those legislators who support PTA positions.

A GOOD CHAIR WILL:

BE a registered voter and vote!

BECOME thoroughly informed on the various issues.

DISCUSS with local, state and national government officials, who represent their district, measures on which support is desired.

STUDY and KNOW the voting record of these officials.

ASSIST in any way possible in helping government officials secure pertinent and authentic information on issues.

BE PREPARED to answer questions about a bill. Bills may be secured by writing the Clerk of the House or of the Senate, depending on the origin of the bill.

HAVE a report of plans and/or activities at every meeting.

KEEP the members informed!

REMEMBER that when you speak as PTA Legislative Action Chair, you are speaking for your Local PTA.

Legislative work in PTA or any other association is simply public relations. It must be a constant effort; however, it cannot be a hit or miss attempt to be effective. It takes a lot of hard work to build a good relationship with legislators of both parties. This is essential for the welfare of the children of the public schools of Texas.

DEVELOPING OUR POLICY AGENDA

National PTA Office of Public Policy — The mission of the National PTA Office of Public Policy (OPP), is to mobilize members to advocate for the education, health, and overall well-being of all children. Each year the Office of Public Policy will develop a focused public policy agenda, prioritize public policy issues, and develop issue expertise so the PTA can act as a leading national advocacy association that provides Congress with sound policy analysis. PTA's public policy agenda provides specific directives on which Congress can act.

The National PTA Legislative Committee exists to assist the PTA and the Office of Public Policy in formulating policies, making policy recommendations, and prioritizing legislative goals.

The Office of Public Policy will use the following criteria in developing PTA's public policy agenda:

- Timeliness of policy issue (is it being considered before Congress and the Administration?);
- Gaps in advocacy efforts among national partners (where can PTA exert influence and develop intellectual and political capital?);
- Alignment to the mission, position statements, and resolutions of PTA; and
- Ability to achieve a meaningful policy change that will produce positive results for children and their families.

Submitting Resolutions to National PTA

National PTA considers resolutions each year at its annual convention. A convention resolution is brought forward at convention because of its importance, length, or complexity. It is submitted in writing and meets certain criteria. A resolution can be submitted by a local, council, district/region, or state PTA, as well as the National PTA Board of Directors.

All resolutions must be received in the National PTA office by December 15, prior to the year of the convention in which the resolution will be voted on, if accepted. No faxes will be accepted, only hard-copy mailed submissions.

Early submission is encouraged. In the event that parts of the resolution or background information are missing you can be notified, or should fine-tuning be needed, a committee member can work with you so that your submission can be made before the deadline date.

Facsimile (faxes) or electronic mail (e-mail) are not accepted.

Convention resolutions may be rejected by the National PTA Board of Directors in accordance to the District of Columbia Code Nonprofit Corporation Act if it is deemed to be not in the best interest of the association. Information on submitting resolutions can be found at www.pta.org

Texas PTA Legislative Program — The Texas legislative program is developed to include a process for members to submit proposals for consideration.

Legislative positions and resolution proposals shall be accepted from the Texas PTA Advocacy Committee, the Texas PTA Board of Directors, Local and Council PTAs, provided that PTA membership is verified by the Texas PTA Office. The proposals shall be signed by the president and secretary of the submitting PTA and show the date of adoption by that PTA. A rationale statement, along with unbiased, well-balanced, substantiating information from reliable sources used in developing the proposal, shall be included with the proposal. The information shall be sufficient to give a person with no prior knowledge of the subject enough information to make an intelligent decision.

Texas PTA shall accept submissions of proposed legislative positions and/or resolutions for consideration at the Texas PTA Annual Meeting on **April 30** and **September 1**, and the Advocacy Committee shall not accept submissions after the September 1 deadline except in the case of an emergency submission.

All submissions shall include two copies of the proposed resolution or legislative position and all supporting documentation and the official submission form, which shall be submitted by mail, fax, or e-mail by September 1 before the Texas PTA Annual Meeting at which it would be considered. All submissions must be sent to the Texas PTA Office. Any submission sent to any other location will not be accepted.

Emergency Submissions

The following provisions are made for submitting emergency resolutions or legislative positions:

- The urgency of the subject matter shall have arisen after the deadline for submission of proposed resolutions or legislative positions.
- Emergency submissions shall conform to all other established criteria and procedures for resolutions or legislative positions.
- The submission package for an emergency resolution or legislative position shall be received at the Texas PTA Office at least 14 days before the first general meeting of the Texas PTA Annual Convention.
- The Texas PTA Board of Directors must approve any emergency resolutions and legislative positions as to meeting the criteria for such before they are presented to the delegate body.

The Texas legislative program is developed from positions and resolutions adopted by the Texas

PTA delegate body in annual convention and are the authority for action during the Texas Legislative Sessions. Adopted positions and resolutions are reviewed by the Advocacy Committee and remain effective for five years. The Texas Board of Directors may take the following actions with respect to a legislative position or resolution in effect for five years:

- a. Forward to the delegate body for reaffirmation
- b. Reclassify the position or resolution as “inactive.” Inactive positions and resolutions will be recorded in a historical listing of Texas position statements. These statements are considered to remain representative of Texas PTA but will not constitute authority for action during Texas Legislative Sessions.

Upon recommendation of the Advocacy Committee, the Texas PTA Board of Directors may reclassify an active legislative position or resolution as “inactive” (before its five-year period is completed) if, in the judgment of the committee, actions taken by the Texas Legislature, the U.S. Congress or other governmental bodies have satisfied the intent of the legislative position or resolution. Such actions will be communicated to the next Texas PTA Annual Meeting delegate body.

Forwarding Resolutions to National PTA

Texas PTA resolutions that are intended to be forwarded to National PTA must include the clause **“Be it resolved that this resolution be forwarded to National PTA.”** Forwarding such resolutions to National PTA shall be the responsibility of the Texas PTA President and staff with the assistance of the sponsoring organization.

The Texas PTA Board of Directors elects the Texas PTA Advocacy Chair and the President appoints the members of the Advocacy Committee. A Governmental Consultant is hired by Texas PTA and works with the Advocacy Committee. During the Legislative Session, the Texas PTA Advocacy Committee and Governmental Consultant monitor and review bills directly related to the adopted Texas PTA legislative program. The committee works to represent the Texas PTA on legislative matters, providing such action is in accord with previously established policies and the Texas PTA legislative program adopted by the delegate body at the annual state convention.

What is a resolution?

The Texas PTA reserves the right to reject a resolution/legislative position for any reason deemed necessary for the best interest of the Texas/National PTA.

A resolution is an original main motion that, because of its importance, length or complexity, is submitted in writing. Resolutions call for action by the Texas PTA or its constituent bodies (Council, or Local PTA). Resolutions seek to address problems, situations or concerns that affect children and youth and that require action for solution.

What is a legislative position?

A legislative position is a call by the Texas PTA for new laws or for revisions to existing laws.

Why submit a resolution or legislative position?

Texas PTA resolutions and legislative positions seek to address problems, situations or concerns that affect children and youth statewide and that require statewide action to be resolved. Positions and resolutions that receive approval from the delegates at Texas PTA convention each year become part of the Texas PTA's legislative agenda. Board members, volunteers and staff use this agenda — the voice of our membership — to persuade legislators and government officials to enact PTA's positions into law.

How long are they effective?

Texas PTA resolutions and legislative positions remain effective for five years after adoption at a Texas PTA Annual Convention. They may be reaffirmed, if necessary. Legislative positions may be withdrawn once the requested legislation is enacted.

Who submits a resolution or legislative position?

Local, Council, or the Texas PTA Board of Directors may submit resolutions or legislative positions for consideration by the Texas PTA delegate body. The resolution or legislative position must have been presented to and adopted by the voting body of the submitting group. Criteria are the same for all PTA bodies at any level. A member of the submitting body must be present at the Texas PTA Annual Meeting to move its adoption. After the motion is on the floor, a member of the submitting body will be allowed to speak in support of the motion in accordance with the prescribed convention rules.

What do they look like?

Resolutions usually consist of two parts:

1. Whereas Clause(s) — preamble or introductory statement(s) that contain the background information and reasons for the resolution. Each statement of information or rationale is listed separately and begins with the word “whereas.”
2. Resolved Clause(s) — the request for action. Each action has its own “resolved” clause.

Legislative positions usually consist of a single statement listing the new law or the change to existing law that is requested.

When are they submitted?

Two copies of the resolution or legislative position submission package must be sent to the Texas PTA Office. Submissions are accepted year round; however, in order to be reviewed and approved for presentation to the delegates at convention, submissions must be received no later than September 1. Contact the Texas PTA Advocacy Committee Chair or a committee member for guidance as you prepare your submission.

What criteria must they meet?

Each resolution or legislative position submitted to the Texas PTA is subject to consideration by a committee of the Texas PTA Board of Directors and must meet the following criteria:

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- Concern the program of the Texas PTA;
 - Be in harmony with national and state PTA policies — noncommercial, nonpartisan, nonsectarian;
 - Concern a matter of national or state scope, not merely local interest;
 - Request action that is both physically and financially feasible for the Texas PTA to undertake; and
 - State a position not previously adopted by the Texas PTA.

What must be submitted?

1. The Submission Cover Sheet completed and signed by the originating group. The cover sheet must include the signatures of the PTA president and secretary and indicate the date on which the originating group adopted the proposal. .
2. The resolution or legislative position itself.
3. Table of Contents for supporting materials.
4. A Rationale Statement (one page or less) summarizing the issue and the need for the requested action.
5. Background materials, documenting each “whereas” clause in a resolution or each statement in a legislative position. This material should indicate that the subject was well researched by the submitting group and should be sufficient to give a person with no previous knowledge of the subject enough information to make an intelligent decision. The material must be unbiased and well balanced and may include PTA-related information such as statements or policies; copies of document research, pertinent laws, surveys or statistics; and copies of relevant articles from publications. Newspaper articles and editorials alone are not sufficient background material.

What happens if an issue arises after the deadline?

Emergency resolutions or legislative positions must conform to all established criteria and procedures for other resolutions or legislative positions. In addition, the issue which the proposed emergency resolution or legislative position addresses, must have arisen after the normal deadline for submitting resolutions and legislative positions. Those wishing to propose an emergency resolution or legislative position must deliver two copies of the complete submission package for the proposal to the Texas PTA Office at least fourteen (14) days prior to the first general session of the state convention.

The Texas PTA Board of Directors will meet after this deadline to determine if the proposed emergency resolution or legislative position meets all requirements for presentation to the convention body. Copies of emergency statements approved for presentation to the convention body shall be prepared for all delegates by the submitting group and delivered to the Texas PTA office prior to the business meeting.

A two-thirds affirmative vote of the delegate body is necessary before an emergency resolution or legislative position shall be considered. There are no guarantees that the convention delegate body will agree to consider the resolution or legislative position.

Forwarding Resolutions to National PTA

A Texas PTA resolution may cover an issue of national scope and therefore be appropriate for consideration by a National PTA convention. Resolutions passed by a Texas PTA convention body will be forwarded to the National PTA **only if the resolution includes the clause “Be it resolved that this resolution be forwarded to National PTA.”**

There are very specific requirements that a resolution must meet in order to be considered by National PTA. Please refer to National PTA Resolutions Toolkit available for download at www.pta.org

Examples

One of the most common questions that the Texas PTA Office receives is, “Should I submit a resolution or a legislative position?” There is no single answer to this question — it depends on the issue and on what you hope to accomplish. A resolution can be submitted on virtually any topic that meets the criteria listed in this guide, while a legislative position is usually reserved for issues that require a new law or changes to existing law. Many topics can be covered by either a resolution or a legislative position; a resolution says, “We believe something **should** happen...” while a legislative position says, “We want a law **requiring** something to happen...”

As an example, consider the National PTA resolution passed in 1983 concerning guidance counseling services in schools. The resolution reads as follows:

TEXAS LEGISLATURE

Introduction

The structure of state government in Texas was developed in the Constitution of the Republic of Texas, prior to joining the United States, and was adopted by the new state in 1876. The state Constitution is essentially the same, although it has been amended over 200 times.

State government controls the types of state and local taxes that may be collected; licenses, trades, programs and professions; protects rights; and sets the legal framework for the family — marriage, divorce, child support and adoption laws. The State Legislature establishes the policies and budgets affecting most governmental programs in the state.

Composition of the Texas Legislature

The Texas Legislature is composed of 150 representatives, elected every two years, and 31 senators, half of whom are elected every two years for a four-year term. The election takes place on the first Tuesday in November of even numbered years. The districts from which the representatives and senators are elected are determined every ten years, based upon the population census. The district boundaries are established so that approximately the same number of people is in each district, in line with the one-man, one-vote principle.

Representatives must be: at least 21 years of age, citizens of the United States, qualified electors of the state and residents of the district from which they are elected. Senators must be: at least 26 years of age, citizens of the United States, qualified electors of the state and residents of the state for five years, with the last year of residence in the district from which they are elected.

When vacancies occur in a legislative district, the Governor shall call for an election to fill the vacancy.

Leadership and Committees

The Lieutenant Governor is the presiding officer of the Senate. The Senate also elects a president pro-tempore, who presides in the absence of the Lieutenant Governor. The Speaker of the House, elected by the House, presides over the House of Representatives. The presiding officers make appointments to committees and assign bills to committees. They recognize legislators who wish to speak during debate on a bill and interpret the rules under which their house operates. The House speaker may vote on all questions. In the Senate, the Lieutenant Governor may vote only to break a tie. In carrying out these duties, those in leadership positions can have a great deal of influence over the progress of bills in the legislature.

In addition to the House and Senate leadership, other very powerful persons in the legislature are the chairmen of the House and Senate committees and subcommittees. This is because assignment to a committee is the only action, which must be taken on each of the several thousand pieces of legislation, which are introduced in each session of the legislature. After the legislation is assigned to committee, it is up to the committee leadership and members to determine whether the bill should be studied further, amended, rejected or passed.

It is very important, therefore, to make sure you have a good working relationship with the House and Senate leadership and with the chairmen of the committees and subcommittees which routinely deal with legislation pertaining to the welfare and education of children. In the Texas Legislature, the committees which most often are called upon to study “children” legislation are:

- Senate Education Committee
- House of Representatives Public Education Committee

Texas Legislative Process

Regular sessions of the Texas Legislature begin on the second Tuesday of odd-numbered years and are limited to 140 calendar days. Only the Governor may call a Special Session, which is limited to 30 days; however, the Governor may call additional Special Sessions. In addition, the only subjects that may be considered during the Special Session of the Legislature are those, which are proposed by the Governor.

Drafting of Legislation

Ideas for new laws come from many sources. The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, members of the Legislature and other government officials may propose laws. Suggestions also come from individual citizens, special-interest groups, newspaper editorials and public protests.

The main research arm of the Legislature is the Legislative Council. The staff of this Council is available to every member of the legislature to conduct research, do in-depth studies and draft legislation. Council staff is not available to the general public for research or bill-drafting purposes. The seventeen members of the Legislative Council, who oversee the work of the staff, are: the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House, five senators and ten representatives.

The Legislative Budget Board (LBB) controls and holds central responsibility in the Legislature for development of the State Budget. The LBB, as it is usually called, develops the State Budget, after holding a series of hearings with each of the state agencies. The Governor's Budget and Planning Office also develops its recommended state budget, which the Governor presents to the legislature during the opening days of the session. However, traditionally it has been the LBB's budget, which has been introduced in the legislature as the Appropriations Bill for state agencies and programs. The LBB is also responsible for reviewing all other bills, which require an appropriation (i.e., funding from the state treasury) in order to be implemented. Ultimately, the LBB — which includes the House and Senate presiding officers — holds considerable power in the Texas Legislature and usually controls the state budget as well.

The ten members of the Legislative Budget Board are:

HOUSE

- Speaker of the House
- Chair, Ways and Means Committee
- Chair, Appropriations Committee
- Two other House members

SENATE

- Lieutenant Governor
- Chair, Finance Committee
- Chair, State Affairs Committee
- Two other Senate members

Introduction of Legislation

Any member of the legislature may introduce legislation. Bills may be pre-filed, usually beginning in November before the session begins in January, or they may be filed during the opening days of the legislative session. The Texas Constitution states that bills, which are filed after the session begins, must be filed during the first 30 days of the session. However, since 1930 the Texas Legislature has routinely passed a "simple resolution" extending this to 60 days after the session begins.

There are exceptions to the above. For example, local bills, emergency appropriations and emergency matters submitted by the Governor are not included in this time limitation. In addition, if a 4/5 vote to suspend the rules is passed, then a bill

may be introduced after the deadline.

The other main rule, with respect to introduction of legislation, is that appropriations bills must originate in the House of Representatives. All other bills may originate in either house. Both the House and Senate sponsors of a bill will often agree to introduce their version of a bill around the same time in order to increase its chances of passage, but this mainly happens when there is broad support for the legislation, or a least widespread interest in it.

Often it is wise for a legislator to pre-file a bill. This process is legally considered the same as if the legislation were filed once the session began. By pre-filing the bill, the legislator gives citizens, staff, lobbyists and the rest of the legislature the opportunity to thoroughly review the legislation before the rush of the session begins. If the legislation addresses a very controversial matter, the legislator may choose to wait until the last opportunity possible to file the bill, hoping that by then it will not get widespread public attention.

Types of Legislation

There are two main types of legislation introduced in the Texas Legislature: bills and resolutions. There are currently three main types of “bills” and three types of “resolutions” developed by the legislature. They are as follows:

Types of Bills:

1. Local Bills — Bills limited to a specific geographic area of the state (e.g. local governmental units such as cities, towns, counties, school districts, precincts, special districts, etc.)
2. Special Bills — These are directed toward select, special individual or entity (e.g. toward blind, but not other disabled persons).
3. General Bills — All other bills are “general” bills.

Types of Resolutions:

1. Simple Resolution — These address issues which only relate to the originating house. They are used for some of the following purposes: establishing rules of that legislative chamber; public recognition of an individual; appointment of officers and staff of that chamber; and so forth.
2. Concurrent Resolution — These resolutions deal with matters of concern to both the House and Senate and must be passed by both chambers before they can be enacted. Issues often dealt with in concurrent resolutions are: time and place of adjournment of the legislative session; urging the U.S. Congress to take a specific action; the calling of joint sessions of both chambers; and requests for information for state agencies.
3. Joint Resolutions — Like concurrent resolutions, joint resolutions deal with matters of importance to both the House and Senate. However, these resolutions only deal with matters of great importance to both bodies, such as proposing a State Constitutional amendment. Joint resolutions addressing state Constitutional Amendments require a 2/3 vote of both houses for passage and are not subject to veto by the Governor. All other joint resolutions — including federal Constitutional Amendments require a simple majority vote of both houses for passage.

It should be noted that with respect to ratification of a **federal** Constitutional Amendment, House rules state that a “joint” resolution **is to be used**; Senate rules are silent on the issue. Therefore, when Texas passed the Equal Rights Amendment, for example, a concurrent instead of a joint resolution was used since the final version originated in the State Senate.

Before either bills or resolutions are passed, however, they are usually amended. Amendments may be made in committee, subcommittee or during full house consideration of the measure. There are two main types of amendments:

1. Simple Amendments — These are usually used when there needs to be a simple addition or deletion of a letter, word, phrase or page of a bill or resolution.

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2. **Substitute Amendments** — This is a total rewrite of the entire original bill or resolution and replaces the original legislation. Substitute amendments are often used when markup of the legislation becomes so cumbersome that it is easier to simply rewrite the original bill. This procedure is also used when the intent of the legislation is fairly acceptable, but the manner in which it is worded is not.

Steps to Enactment

The various steps, which are followed from introduction to passage of legislation, are outlined in the “Steps in Passing a Bill”. Summarized below are the major steps.

- **Action by Committee** — The first step toward passage of a piece of legislation is assignment of the bill to a committee. As was previously pointed out, the presiding officers in the House and Senate are responsible for assigning a bill to a particular committee for study. Since the committee to which a bill is assigned holds all control over the bill’s future at that point, it is critical for the sponsor of the bill to get the bill assigned to a committee which will be sympathetic to its intent. The committee chairman controls most of the decision-making on assignment of the bill to a subcommittee for further study, whether to hold a public hearing on the bill — thereby giving it widespread public attention and possibly support — and so forth. In addition, a very strong committee chair is sometimes successful in protecting a bill from a multitude of amendments, which might injure the original intent of the legislation.

Another reason committees of the legislature are so important is because they often have larger and more highly specialized staff available to research the issues studied by the committee. Since around 3,600 bills and several hundred resolutions are introduced in each 140-day session of the legislature, it is obvious that relatively few are studied in great depth. In fact, most bills die “in committee” because they are assigned to the committee and then never acted upon. Those bills, which do have the support and interest of the committee leadership and members, are assigned to specific persons on the committee staff for further study.

Many of the legislature’s standing committees also have subcommittees, and accompanying staff, to work on in-depth studies of legislation. It is up to the committee leadership, however, as to whether legislation is kept in the full committee, or referred to the subcommittee for study. Referral to subcommittee can be either a positive or negative move. For example, if the subcommittee has fairly weak leadership and members, then the recommendation from the subcommittee on the bill may in effect kill it. However, if the subcommittee has strong leadership, its recommendation strongly enhances the chances for passage of the legislation.

Finally, it is important to note that from time to time the legislature establishes certain “special” and “select” committees. These usually are short-term, without voting powers over legislation, and serve mainly for the purpose of making recommendations to the Legislature on specific matters of concern. Sometimes these special committees are referred to as “Interim Committees”, which means that they hire staff to assist them in researching a particular issue during the period when the legislature is not in its 140-day, biennial session. Recommendations coming out of these committees are usually given a lot of serious consideration in the following and subsequent sessions of the legislature.

- **Floor Action** — After legislation is approved by subcommittee and then by committee, it goes to the full House or Senate for consideration. Since this is actually the first time that all members of the House or Senate chamber — whichever is considering the bill — have an opportunity to express their views on the legislation, there is often lengthy debate on the floor at this stage of the bill’s life. Usually a series of amendments are offered on the floor and each is often discussed before being voted upon. Many bills are voted down at this point in the process. The ones, which pass, however, are then sent to the other house for consideration in the same manner. Eventually, both houses must approve the exact same wording of the legislation before it can be sent to the governor for signing into law.

- **Conference Committee** — If both the House and Senate cannot agree on the wording of a particular bill, but have little disagreement on its primary intent, then a House/Senate Conference Committee is appointed by the leadership

in each chamber to work out the details of the bill. Once agreeable language is developed, both the House and Senate then must approve it before it can be sent to the Governor for signature.

- **Action by the Governor** — The Governor must sign all bills and joint resolutions, except for state Constitutional Amendments. His signature is not required on simple and concurrent resolutions, since they usually deal strictly with legislative matters that do not affect the general public. If the Governor vetoes a bill or joint resolution, however, then it is sent back to the Legislature with a message as to why it was vetoed. A 2/3 vote by both the House and Senate is needed to override the veto, and thereby pass the legislation into law without the Governor’s signature.
- **Action by the State Comptroller** — Before appropriations bills can be sent to the Governor for signature, they must first be approved by the State Comptroller, who says whether state funds are available to be spent for the appropriation measure. If the comptroller says that funds are not available, the appropriation bill is sent back to the House and Senate. Both houses must then either trim the measure to meet available funds or pass it over the Comptroller’s “red tag” by a 4/5 vote of both houses.

Implementation of The Legislation

Once a bill passes the legislature, is signed by the Governor and has been published, the directions in the bill still need to be carried out. The bill assigns the responsibility to a state agency to implement a new or revised program, and to the courts and law enforcement officials to implement civil and criminal laws.

Often the state agencies need to develop or modify administrative rules to implement a new law. There is a procedure for publication and notice of hearings on proposed administrative rules in the Texas Register. Oral and written testimony is taken on the proposed rules. Following the modifications made as a result of the reactions received on the proposed rules, the administrator or the board responsible for that agency will declare the administrative rule to be final. When the “final rule” is published in the Texas Register, it carries the force of law.

Steps In Passing a Bill

1. After the preliminary business of opening a session, the presiding officer (the Speaker in the House and the Lt. Governor in the Senate) calls for the introduction of bills. While a bill may be introduced in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, this description assumes introduction in the House.

The Bill Is Introduced

2. Any member may file a bill with the Clerk of the House.

First Reading

3. The House Clerk assigns a number to the face of the bill and reads the bill by title only (this is called the first reading).

The Bill Is Sent to Committee

4. The presiding officer refers the bill to the proper committee.

Hearings Are Held By the Committee

5. In committee, the bill is read and discussed. Public hearings are held so that both the proponents and opponents may express themselves.

Bills Are Voted Upon In Committee and Reported to Floor

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6. The committee may report the bill (a) do pass, (b) do not pass, (c) do pass with amendment or (d) draft a substitute bill and return it to the House or it may take no action.

On Perfection, Debate Takes Place on the Bill At Second Reading

7. After hearing the recommendations of the committee, the full House of Representatives takes over to decide what to do with the bill. The members all have the right to make speeches and suggest further amendments. At this time a bill may be (a) postponed, (b) passed, (c) defeated, (d) amended and passed, (e) amended and defeated or (f) tabled and postponed indefinitely. To be perfected a majority of the House is required, a quorum being present.

Third Reading and Final Passage

8. The bill is then read a third time and taken up for final passage. The vote of all House members is taken and if more than half the total membership vote favorably, it is declared passed; 76 votes are required.

The Bill Goes to the Senate, First Reading

9. The Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives then delivers the bill to the Senate.

Referral to Committee

10. Usually, on the next legislative day, the bill is referred to a Senate standing committee.

Senate Committee Hearings

11. In committee the bill is read and discussed. Public hearings are held so that both the proponents and opponents are given an opportunity to express their views.

The Senate Committee Reports on the Bill

12. The committee may report the bill (a) do pass, (b) do not pass, (c) do pass with amendment or (d) draft a substitute bill or take no action.

On Perfection, Debate Takes Place on the Bill At Second Reading

13. After hearing the recommendations of the committee, the full Senate takes over to decide what to do with the bill. The members all have the right to make speeches and suggest further amendments. At this time a bill may be (a) postponed, (b) passed, (c) defeated, (d) amended and passed, (e) amended and defeated or (f) tabled and postponed indefinitely. To be perfected a majority of the Senate is required, a quorum being present.

Third Reading and Final Passage

14. The Senate then brings the bill up for third reading and final passage. It can be amended. A majority (that is, at least 16 votes) is required for final passage.

Conference Committee Irons Out House & Senate Differences

15. If the house, in which the bill originated, does not concur in amendments added by the other house, the bill must be sent to conference committee for settling differences.

The conference committee consists of members from each of the two houses (usually five each). It is its job to try to reach a common understanding acceptable to both houses.

If both houses accept the conference committee report, the bill is ready to be signed by the presiding officers of each house.

Speaker of House and President of Senate Sign Bill

16. The bill must then be signed by the presiding officer of each of the two houses in open session and delivered to the Governor that same day.

The Bill Goes to the Governor For His Consideration And Signature

17. The Governor has 10 days to consider a bill and shall return it to the house of its origin with his approval or accompanied by his objections. If the Governor approves the bill, it shall become a law.

When the legislature adjourns, the Governor may return any bill within 20 days with his approval or reasons for disapproval.

The Veto

18. In case of veto by the Governor, if the legislature still wants the bill to become a law in spite of the veto, each of the two houses will have to repass the bill by two-thirds vote of its total membership, i.e., 21 senators and 100 representatives will be needed to override the veto.

Whenever the Governor Fails to Return A Bill

19. Whenever the Governor fails to return a bill, within the period provided by the Constitution, the bill becomes law as if he had signed it.

Bill Is Returned By Governor

20. When the legislature is in session, the Governor returns a bill to the house of its origin. If the legislature is not in session, a bill is returned to the Secretary of State.

EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

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. The 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 children.

This guide is meant to empower the PTA's greatest strength — its members — with effective strategies and resources for advocacy.

Setting the Stage for Advocacy

- 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;
- Share information from National PTA's monthly e-newsletter also available on their website at www.pta.org;
- 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; and
- Involve people who want to be involved in ways that allow them to use their special skills.

How Do We Do It?

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/or community?
- What is the desired outcome?
- Can the issue be made understandable to those within and outside of PTA?
- Is the issue winnable?

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.

Organizing for Action

Policy makers and the general public listen if a large group of people speaks out. Organize your PTA members; reach out to include other community groups. An 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 people who can affect the outcome of the issue (school boards, legislators, voters, influential organizations); and
- Tactics that fit the goals and involve many people in a variety of activities.

Developing the Plan

An effective advocacy campaign 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.
- Reach out to your members.
- Survey to find out how they feel.
- Target newsletters and membership meetings to get out the message.
- Reach out to the community.
- Conduct opinion polls to get a feel for community support/opposition.
- Establish coalitions for broader outreach.

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. Get on their mailing lists.
- Find out if they have a website.
- Get acquainted with the legislators' staff.
- Know who handles specific issues.
- Visit the staff in the district office.
- Begin the lobbying process early.

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- Start before any bill appears in the legislature.
 - If your issue is already in a bill, know the bill name and number.
 - Communicate regularly. (See “Methods of Communication” found later in this section.)

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:

Newspapers. Consider press releases, news stories, press statements, letters to the editor, op-eds (opinion editorials). Get to know the editorial board as well as the reporters who cover the issues about which you are concerned.

Radio. Radio programming offers a variety of formats; consider news programs, call-in shows, and public service programs. Suggest your concern as a topic for a radio talk show or public service program.

Television. This medium demands a visual presentation of your message. Consider action events, location for an interview, etc. Don’t overlook cable TV and public access channels.

Cultivate relationships with media contacts 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 that can be relied on to have the most up-to-date, factual information concerning the issue at hand.

Speaking in Public

Speaking publicly, whether in debate, as a panelist, or as spokesperson before a group, is the part of advocacy that causes the most concern for many people. A few tips can calm fears:

- Prepare both content (what you’ll say) and delivery (how you’ll say it).
- Know your audience; tell them what’s important to them.
- Emphasize key points over and over.
- Establish eye contact with the audience.
- Use visual aids if appropriate.
- Be brief.
- In a debate, keep to the key issues.
- Leave your opponents with their dignity intact.
- Don’t make enemies in either victory or defeat.

State PTA Legislative Materials are developed in each state for specific use in dealing with state legislative structure, state legislators, lawmaking process and resources.

Methods of Communication

Letters, Postcards and Emails

Letters and emails not only alert policy-makers to your views, but they help educate members about issues and involve them in advocacy. Letters can be handwritten or typed and express an opinion in the writer’s own words. Emails should be reviewed for errors in spelling and grammar. Avoid form letters if possible.

When writing, give attention to the following:

- Stick to one subject.
- Be accurate.
- Be polite and positive.
- Show how the issue will affect the legislator's constituents.
- Explain what action you want to happen.
- Give the PTA position.

Phone Calls, Email, Faxes

Phone calls, email, 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 emailing 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 legislator to vote in your favor.
- If phoning, record what was said.
- If phoning, write down your speaking points in advance.

Using a Telephone/Email Tree

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. It is important to have reliable lead callers and accurate, brief information to pass along.

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.
- State who will be present for the appointment.
- Draft an agenda and list the issues to be discussed.
- If more than one person will be at the meeting, decide who will speak and on what issues.
- Arrive on time.
- Be open to questions.
- If you don't know the answer, explain that you'll get back with more information.

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- Ask how the lawmaker will vote on the issue.
 - After the visit, write a thank you note and repeat your position.

Testifying before Policy Makers

Public testimony can be before a school board, a town council or state or federal legislators. Request in writing to testify, explaining why you want to speak and the perspective you would bring. Provide written testimony for filing with the group. You can expect to be limited in the amount of time you are allowed to speak. Oral testimony should be brief and have a central purpose and clear talking points. State the PTA's position and how you want policy makers to respond.

Follow-up

After expressing your views, whether in person or by letter, e-mail or fax, follow up on the legislator's vote or action. Always send a thank you note if the vote or action was in your favor. A polite note expressing your disappointment if the policy maker was against your position is also necessary. Your appreciation can also be expressed in more public ways, such as writing letters to the editor of the local paper.

RESOURCES

Texas PTA is committed to providing our volunteer leaders across the state with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their role within PTA. Access to quality educational resources is a key component in supporting this success, as well as continuing to build strong Local and Council PTAs.

FOUNDATIONS

FOUNDATIONS courses provide a broad overview of “what” PTA is, and share important information that every PTA leader should know. In addition to the courses offered for all board members, Texas PTA has also created a series of brief *FOUNDATIONS* courses that provide general information for many Local PTA board positions. It is important to note that these position-specific courses are not meant to be comprehensive training, rather a quick review of each position for newly-elected or prospective nominees. Other than *FOUNDATIONS: Leader Orientation*, all *FOUNDATIONS* courses are web-based presentations.

ALL BOARD MEMBERS

- Council PTA Board Orientation
- Inclusiveness
- Leader Orientation
- Local PTA Board Orientation

POSITION SPECIFIC

- Arts in Education
- Communications
- Environmental Awareness
- Fundraising
- Healthy Lifestyles
- Historian
- Legislative Action
- Membership
- Parent Education Programs
- Parliamentarian
- President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Volunteer Coordinator

BASICS

The *BASICS* series contains detailed information to support volunteer leaders in their specific board position. Texas PTA strongly encourages every board member to attend a *BASICS* course for their own position, as well as any other related positions.

BASICS courses are currently available for face-to-face presentations during LAUNCH and through your Council PTA or Field Service Representative, as well as scheduled web-based trainings hosted by Texas PTA. In addition to the training presentation, all *BASICS* courses have a companion Resource Guide, Quick-Start Guide, and Duties-at-a-Glance. These guides are available via download from the Texas PTA website or for purchase through Texas PTA’s STAR Co-op (online store). Courses marked with an asterisk (*) will debut at a future date.

- Arts Education
- Communications
- Environmental Awareness*
- Fundraising
- Healthy Lifestyles
- Legislative Action
- Membership
- Parent Education / Programs
- Parliamentarian
- President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Volunteer Coordinator

SPOTLIGHTS

PTAs have many unique programs, processes and responsibilities as healthy, thriving non-profits. *SPOTLIGHTS* courses offer an in-depth review of some of these most important and recurring PTA functions.

SPOTLIGHTS courses are available during LAUNCH and through on-demand, web-based presentations hosted by Texas PTA.

- Bylaws and Standing Rules
- Conducting a Meeting
- Financial Reconciliation
- Nominations and Elections

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