



# Running Your PTA When School Is Closed

April 15, 2020

PTA Leader,

We cannot thank you enough for supporting your members, units, students, educators and communities during these difficult times. The COVID-19 pandemic has closed schools across Louisiana, and that has left many PTAs wondering how they can handle their business when school is closed, and in-person meetings are not permitted or advisable. Like you, the Louisiana State PTA Board of Directors is having to address these issues as well, and we will continue to provide our PTAs with advice and guidance on how to proceed in this unprecedented situation.

During these extraordinary times, and working under both state and federal disaster, emergency, and pandemic declarations, LAPTA is attempting to provide adequate and full flexibility to districts and units to allow for appropriate business to continue under these circumstances. Once schools resume normal operations, we expect districts and local units to resume normal PTA practices for business.

## **General Guidance for Districts and Units**

Waiting on PTA business (if possible) should be an option to consider. In cases where waiting is not practical, we offer the following guidance.

The LAPTA Board of Directors is providing for flexibility in state, district, and local unit business, including:

1. Allowing board and general meetings by electronic means, phone or video conferencing, and/or virtual means, even if your current by-laws do not provide for these types of meetings;
2. Allowing for voting by mail, electronic means, phone or video conferencing, and/or virtual means even if your current by-laws do not provide for this type of voting; and
3. Delegating the authority to each District PTA Board of Directors to determine if they will permit elections in their district by mail, electronic means, phone/video conferencing, and/or virtual means even if current by-laws do not provide for these types of elections.

It is recommended to keep detailed minutes of meetings, decisions, voting, and elections that are held, and (if possible) ratify all decisions once in-person meetings have begun again.

We have compiled a list of questions you may need answered on how your PTA can continue to operate. As always, the key to running your PTA is in your bylaws, so be sure to have them at hand when discussing how your PTA will be moving forward with your board. If you have questions not addressed here, please contact your District President.

### **What PTA business must be done by the general membership?**

The list of items that your PTA bylaws require your PTA's membership to vote on is fairly short:

- Accepting the audit report (at the first membership meeting of the fiscal year)
- Adopting or amending the budget
- Adopting or amending the bylaws (note: requires a two-thirds majority)
- Election of the nominating committee
- Election of officers

Be sure to double-check your actual bylaws to ensure there are no other items that the general membership must vote on. Items to check include how both committee chairs and the audit committee are put in place.

Also note that all bylaws referenced here refer to the standard Louisiana PTA Bylaws for Local Units. Your actual PTA bylaws may have the relevant section slightly off from these references if your PTA has added sections in certain spots.

### **What PTA business can the Board of Directors handle?**

Beyond the basic items listed in the question above, the Executive Board (your officers and committee chairs) can handle essentially all the remaining business your PTA needs to conduct.

### **What guidance can you provide if our PTA or board decides to meet virtually?**

All attendees need to be able to hear and follow the business being discussed. You will need a platform that can handle the size of your meeting. Keep in mind that a virtual general membership meeting may have many more participants than a regular in-person meeting, so plan accordingly. Louisiana State PTA does not endorse any

specific virtual meeting platform, but an internet search provides this incomplete list of companies offering virtual meeting services listed at the end of this document.

Most virtual meeting platforms are fairly easy to use, so you probably won't have too much trouble. Consider running a quick practice meeting with a couple of your PTA board members or even your kids to ensure that you know how to start the meeting, that you know how to show documents on your screen, that people can hear you talk, and that you know how to use the platform.

### **What if we can't hold a virtual meeting for all our members?**

If for any reason your PTA cannot hold a virtual meeting for the general membership, your bylaws do allow your Executive Committee (i.e., your officers) to conduct business vital to the operation of your PTA in an emergency; however, no action can conflict with that taken by the general membership or Executive board. This should be in Article IX – Executive Committee, Section 3 of your PTA's bylaws. **Note that this does not mean your Executive Committee can elect your nominating committee or officers for next year.**

### **If allowed by our District PTA BOD, how do we conduct the election of officers online?**

*Important – units have no obligation to hold elections under current conditions. You may simply wait until an in-person election meeting can be held. At some point however, elections may be a necessity. You should look at voting procedures that closely approximate the fairness you would normally require, such as making determinizations about who is eligible to vote and how you verify eligibility.*

**If your PTA has elected its nominating committee and the committee has met and decided on the slate of officers**, you should follow your bylaws as closely as possible in publishing the slate of officers and presenting the nominating committee report to your general membership via electronic means.

**If your PTA has elected a nominating committee, but they have not yet decided on the slate**, the committee should meet either by conference call or virtually (e.g. Free Conference Call, Zoom, free GoTo Meeting). The Call to Nominations can be conducted electronically, and once the nominating committee has its slate, you can announce the candidate slate electronically.

**If your PTA has NOT elected its nominating committee:** (1) your unit can wait until they are able to hold an in-person meeting, or (2) your unit can hold a virtual meeting and elect the committee members according to unit bylaws. The Call to Nominations can be conducted electronically, and once the nominating committee has its slate, you can announce the candidate slate electronically.

**Members must be given the opportunity to nominate from the floor** (see LAPTA Resource Guide 2019-2020, Section 7, page 4, Conducting the Election). The name of any nominees from the floor must be sent to the nominating committee chair in advance. The advance notice will allow for the “floor” nominee’s name to be added to the ballot used in the virtual election. Your electronic meeting notice to the general membership should include this requirement along with your slate.

### **Requirements to conduct a virtual election meeting:**

- The unit **must** have an email roster of each current member.
- Two forms of notification (E-Newsletter, FaceBook, PTA/PTSA website, school Robo-call, etc.) must be used to notify members of the meeting details.
- Ensure that each voting member has access to the technology needed to vote.
- Since membership cards cannot be presented, the unit secretary must have a complete membership list available to ascertain the eligibility of members before voting.
- Verify that you have a quorum present when the election is conducted.
- Conduct a ballot vote in some manner, regardless if you have an uncontested or contested position for election.

### **Can we vote electronically?**

Yes; however, the manner of voting needs to be anonymous. Your virtual meeting platform may provide a way to do this (it may be described as a “poll”). You may need to find an online voting platform to do this.

### **Can we vote by mail?**

Yes; however, you still need the online election meeting to allow for nominations from the floor. Once nominations are complete, you can mail out a ballot for contested elections.

To vote by mail, you will need to ensure that ballots are sent to every member, that there is no easy way to duplicate ballots (e.g., by scanning a blank ballot and printing more out), that there is a reasonable deadline for returning ballots, and that a quorum of votes are returned.

### **What if we can't hold an election meeting physically or virtually?**

If an election meeting is not possible, the current officers continue to serve in their positions until their successors are elected and assume their duties (see Article VI – Officers, Section 4, Assuming Office of your PTA bylaws). As soon as a physical meeting is possible, the Executive Board should call for a special general membership meeting to elect new officers (see Article XI – General Membership Meetings, Section 2 of your PTA bylaws for timing between the call and meeting).

### **Do you have any guidance for our treasurer?**

The National PTA Secretary/Treasurer is working with the State Treasurers in developing guidelines to assist District and Local Units. As soon as this information is provided to the LAPTAs we will pass it on.

### **Our unit by-laws are expiring (or have expired). What should we do?**

If your unit by-laws are expired/expiring and your unit has made no changes, continue to operate with your present by-laws. Please follow the guidance provided on the Louisiana State PTA website at <http://www.louisianapta.com/bylaws.html> to submit your current by-laws for review.

If your unit desires to update your by-laws please review the guidance provided on our website. You are required to follow the process outlined in the Resource Guide, which includes approval by your general membership before submission to state. All of the steps required can be accomplished through electronic means.

### **Teacher Appreciation Week is coming up. Our unit usually conducts a wide variety of activities at our school. What can we do now?**

We suggest you consider hosting Virtual Teacher Appreciation Events. There are many ideas provided on Facebook and the internet right now. If you are not already a member of the Facebook group, PTA Local Leaders, we suggest you join (they are a closed group) and review the ideas suggested there.

Gift Cards – yes or no? Our continuing status as a non-profit requires we operate within the guidelines of state and federal laws. Your PTA should not purchase gift cards for distribution to teachers, staff, and administration. However, you are allowed to distribute gift cards provided to the PTA by members of your unit, and members of our community.

Remember, you are not required to expend the funds for Teacher Appreciation events

this operational year because of our extenuating circumstances. Your unit can carry those funds over into the 2020 – 2021 Operational Year Budget and deposit them into the same line item. Just a reminder – your unit should always use designated funds for the purpose they were donated. Example: If I as a member have donated \$20.00 in my First Day Packet, and designated that money for use in supporting teachers, I expect the PTA leadership to use my donation only to support teachers. This seems so obvious but adding this reminder may provide a unit leader in our state support in the event they are asked to use funds for items and activities not originally budgeted for by the general membership.

**Will Louisiana State PTA be hosting a State Meeting/Convention this operational year?**

The Louisiana State PTA Meeting for the General Membership was scheduled to be held May 2, 2020. We are cancelling this meeting and will conduct the statewide meeting this fall. The date is not set yet.

**Additional Questions? Please contact your District President for information.**

These are challenging times – and our PTA leaders and members have responded with selflessness, flexibility, and fortitude. We have the unique opportunity to innovate, grow, and connect with our families, each other and our communities in new and meaningful ways. Know that we are in this together and we will get through this together.

Shannon M. Howard  
President  
Louisiana State PTA

## **General Advice for Virtual Meetings**

- A virtual meeting often works best for a small group, like an executive committee or board that needs to address a specific topic or issue.
- Virtual technology must allow for all attending to join a meeting and interact with one another at the same time, and you should ensure the technical resources needed to attend the meeting (like broadband or a webcam) should be widely available.
- If internet access is a concern, a conference call may be your best bet.
- Regardless of who officially “hosts” the virtual meeting, the usual presiding officer should conduct the meeting itself.
- All potential attendees should receive advance notification with the date, time, and link or phone number they will use to join.
- The agenda and other meeting materials should be distributed in advance.
- Once the meeting is called to order, the secretary should call the roll to both take attendance and establish there is a quorum for the meeting.

## **Other things to consider before your meeting:**

- Set the ground rules in advance.
- Remind everyone to mute themselves if they are not speaking. (Note: Most platforms give the meeting facilitator the ability to mute all participants at once, so be sure you know how to do that should some unfortunate background noises happen during your meeting.)
- Set a strict starting time that is convenient for all participants. Encourage people to plan on joining the meeting a few minutes before the starting time so they can work out any technical issues they might encounter before the start of the meeting.
- Make sure everyone has the meeting agenda and all information prior to the start of the meeting.
- Consider having all the documents you intend to show on your screen in a specific folder with numbered file names in the order you will need them. This will cut down on the time it takes you to find the next document you need (even if you have them all open and accessible in your taskbar).

## **When conducting the meeting:**

- Conduct a roll call at the beginning of the meeting to ensure you have a quorum. If you do this by having people announce themselves on the call, consider going through the alphabet by first or last name so everyone doesn't

try to announce themselves at the same time (i.e., “Everyone who’s last name starts with A please announce yourself.”).

- Ask speakers to identify themselves before speaking every time. This also helps your secretary keep the minutes.
- To prevent disruptive background noise, everyone should mute their speaker when listening.
- You may need to remind people occasionally to unmute themselves to speak.
- Just like in a regular in-person meeting, allow only one person to speak at a time.
- Each participant may speak up to two minutes per discussion topic.
- Each person should have the opportunity to speak once before anyone gets a second turn.
- A designated timekeeper will keep track of speakers and their allotted time.
- All participants will keep to the agenda and stay on task—no sidebars!
- Votes on action items may be done by voice vote, but if you are unsure of the result from a voice vote, conduct a roll call vote by the secretary using the roll from the start of the meeting (and adding anyone who has joined the meeting since then). The secretary can give the results of the vote, but the president (or person presiding) must announce the results themselves and declare whether the motion has passed or failed.

#### **Other tips on running a virtual meeting:**

- [Three Tips for Facilitating Virtual Meetings](#)
- [Running Effective Virtual #Nonprofit Meetings: 9 Best Practices for Facilitating Engagement](#)
- [12 Handy Tips for Running Better Remote Meetings](#)

#### **Some examples of free/low cost technology which your unit might use if you decide to have a conference call or virtual meeting:**

- Please see here for an article on [“The 6 Best Free Video Conferencing Apps”](#)
- Please see here for an article on [“20 Best Free Online Voting Websites.”](#) which also includes a summary of positives and negatives of each software
- **Conference call technology (offered for informational purposes only, not a recommendation):**

- Google Hangouts – <https://hangouts.google.com/>
  - Cisco Webex – <https://www.webex.com/>
  - Zoom – <https://www.zoom.us/>
  - Skype – <https://www.skype.com/en/>
  - Free Conference – <https://www.freeconference.com/>
  - Jitsi – <https://jitsi.org/>
- **Online Polling Technology (offered for informational purposes only, not a recommendation):**
- Google Forms – <https://www.google.com/forms/about/>
  - Doodle – [www.doodle.com](http://www.doodle.com)
  - Mentimeter – <https://www.mentimeter.com/>
  - FreeOnlineSurveys – <https://freeonlinesurveys.com/>
  - Murvey – <https://www.murvey.com/>
  - EasyPolls – <https://www.easypolls.net/>
  - PollMaker – <https://www.poll-maker.com/>
  - PollSnack – <https://www.snacktools.com/>
  - Jot Form – [www.jotform.com](http://www.jotform.com)
  - TypeForm – [www.typeform.com](http://www.typeform.com)
  - Formsite – <https://www.formsite.com/>
  - Wufoo – <https://www.wufoo.com/>
  - EmailMeForm – <https://www.emailmeform.com/>
  - Poll Junkie – <http://polljunkie.com/>
  - Survey Planet – <https://surveyplanet.com/>