

ADVOCACY

2020 – 2021

Section 9

INTRODUCTION

PTA's goal is that every member will be a trained, effective advocate for children, empowering parents, teachers and others to speak for every child with one voice. PTA members, as advocates, engage in many different activities whose purpose is to improve the lives of children; to be the voice of every child.

The legislative chair and committee can encourage all PTA members to be involved by providing awareness of issues, generating interest, sharing information and educating the membership.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEGISLATIVE CHAIR

- Learn how a bill becomes law; know how to get copies of bills; learn how to obtain information on and track bills.
- Know the legislative calendar.
- Become knowledgeable about proposed legislation and regulatory issues that affect the health, education, safety and welfare of children and youth.
- Maintain a list of the names, addresses, phone/fax numbers and e-mail addresses for all elected representatives from your area.
- Invite elected officials to visit your school.
- Designate a representative from your PTA to attend school board meetings and to disseminate information on proceedings to members.
- Become familiar with National PTA's current legislative program, priorities and positions and with the Louisiana PTA's legislative platform and resolutions.
- Identify issues of local need or special interest.
- Report to your membership about issues affecting the school and community and the legislative activities at all levels of government.
- Write newsletter articles and circulate materials from your district, the Louisiana and National PTAs.
- Join the National PTA "Member-to-Member" Network, and subscribe to the e-newsletter, "PTA Takes Action." To sign up, visit <http://www.pta.org/newsletters>
- Establish a method for sharing Legislative Action Alerts with other PTA members.
- Attend district, Louisiana PTA and National PTA workshops, trainings and conventions.



ADVOCACY and LOBBYING

Advocacy

PTA advocacy encompasses all activities that serve to preserve and improve public education as well as ensuring the “care and protection of children and youth” at home, in the school, and in the community. Since its inception in 1897, National PTA has recognized that an organization dedicated to the welfare of children and youth must inevitably concern itself with the laws that affect children or those that may be needed to protect them.

Every action to improve the lives of children is advocacy. Parents are already advocates for their children in their parental roles as nurturers, teachers, communicators, advisors, supporters, collaborators and decision makers. Working together in PTA, the advocacy skills parents possess and use for the benefit of their own children are used for the benefit of all the children and youth in the school, community, state or the nation.

Local unit, district and Louisiana PTAs participate in advocacy efforts every time they present a program on an issue, distribute a newsletter, network with other PTAs, offer a student or teacher scholarship, participate in programs such as Reflections, call a legislator, meet with the school administrator, write a letter to the editor of the community newspaper or initiate a safety campaign.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Although most people use the words interchangeably, there is a distinction between advocacy and lobbying. When nonprofit organizations such as the PTA advocate on their own behalf, they seek to affect some aspect of society, whether they appeal to individuals about their behavior, employers about their rules, or the government about its laws. Lobbying refers specifically to advocacy efforts that attempt to influence legislation. One way to understand the difference is that lobbying always involves advocacy but advocacy does not always involve lobbying.

The following are some sample PTA activities, which may be used as general guidelines in determining what constitutes advocacy and what constitutes lobbying efforts.

Advocacy

- Informing members of legislative issues and positions critical to the goals of the organization.
- Researching and conducting non-partisan analysis on legislation, stating facts fully, stating the PTA’s positions of inviting legislators or staff to visit or learn about PTA.
- Explaining to members the effect of a piece of legislation.
- Attending workshops on how to lobby.
- Responding to official requests by legislative bodies for information or for testimony on a PTA position.
- Conducting a candidate forum.
- Endorsing or opposing the school budget.

Lobbying

- Telling people, your members included, to write or call supporting PTA's position on legislation or proposed legislation.
- Testifying about a position before a legislative body when you have not been specifically invited to appear.
- Writing a letter to the editor which seeks to sway the community outside the PTA membership to a position.
- Making a trip to the capitol specifically to change a legislator's mind about an issue.
- Placing an ad in an attempt to sway the general public to action supporting the PTA position on legislation or proposed legislation.
- The IRS limits the amount of money a PTA may spend on lobbying activities -- generally 5% of a unit's budget. If your unit plans a lobbying effort, it is important to keep accurate financial records.



LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

Because PTAs are 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations, IRS rules regulating some types of legislative activities must be followed.

Prohibitions

PTAs are prohibited from participating or intervening in political campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for political office. Any violation of the political campaign guidelines may result in revocation of a unit's tax-exempt status and loss of deductible contributions. Moreover, the IRS will consider complaints from the public that an educational organization is engaged in impermissible political campaign activity. During an election year, questions about IRS political restrictions for non-profits increase tremendously.

Endorsements

PTAs may not make statements, oral or written, supporting or opposing any candidate for public office. They may not encourage votes for or against any candidate for public office, via a speech, PTA bulletin, editorial position or other media. PTAs should avoid statements that indirectly support or oppose a particular candidate, such as labeling a candidate as pro-education or anti-teacher.

Financial and Other Support

A PTA may not provide financial support to any candidate or political party. In addition, it may not provide other forms of campaign support, such as free volunteers, facilities, or mailing lists to any candidate. It may not use PTA letterhead to solicit contributions.

Political Action Committees

A PAC is a political committee whose purpose is to influence the election of individuals to public office. Generally, 501(c)(3) may not establish or support, financially or otherwise, a PAC.

PTA officers, employees and volunteers may choose to participate on their own in the political process. Remember, however, that in one's official capacity as an officer, employee or volunteer of the PTA, an individual may not make a speech endorsing a candidate for public office nor make a contribution to a political organization or candidate for public office.

Ballot Issues

A ballot issue is legislation that needs approval from the voter in order to become law. PTAs may work to support or oppose the passage of a ballot issue within the IRS limits on lobbying.

Guidelines

PTAs can play a key role in educating their membership and school communities regarding important ballot issues that affect the health and welfare of children. A local unit may take a stand on a tax levy, a bond election or any state ballot initiative that falls within the Purposes of the PTA, is part of the Louisiana PTA platform or is part of a National PTA resolution or position paper.

A PTA may take a stand on a ballot issue provided that it falls in the area defined above. If your executive board votes for or against an issue, they may publicize their decision as the executive board of the PTA supports or opposes the ballot issue. The same applies for your board of directors and general membership. All of these decisions must be recorded in the minutes.

PTAs may help ballot issue campaigns by providing volunteers for distributing literature, placing of yard signs, making phone calls, etc.



ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

PLAN

Identify issues which are possible areas of advocacy

- Left over legislation from the previous year
- Current issues getting attention
- Longstanding issues that need to be revisited

Conduct research to learn more about each identified issue

- Previous legislative action (bills, committee reports)
- Information from credible organizations
- First-hand knowledge or facts based on your experience of the experience of others in the community such as school personnel, public health officials, etc.

Solicit information from other PTA members

- Do they share your concerns and are there additional issues to add to your list?
- What can they add to your knowledge base?

Build consensus within your PTA

- Are there members who have objections and concerns? Can these be resolved? If you can't do it within your PTA, you are going to have a difficult time doing so outside the organization.
- Are a majority of your members in support of your position on the issue?

Identify the decision makers

- Who has the authority to change what you want changed – school administration, school board, city or parish council, legislators, governor, etc.

Determine timelines as each legislative and decision making body has its own

- Is there a set day for starting and stopping the work of the decision making body?
- What is the budget cycle?
- Are there standard vacation periods such as summer when school is out?

STRATEGIZE

Prioritize your issues

- What is important to your students, parents, school, community or state?
- What is the likelihood of success?
- Will this have a positive impact if you are successful?

Clarify your goals

- What specifically do you want to achieve? High quality public education is not a specific goal.

Identify possible allies and opponents

- A broad range of allies increases your credibility.
- In addition to other groups in your school, other PTAs and teachers unions, you may want to approach the chamber of commerce, religious community, business owners, civic groups, etc.

Craft an Effective Message

- One phrase that you want people to remember when they think about the issue.

Prepare advocacy packets

- Should include a one page memo that is clear, concise and research based

Plan advocacy events and activities

TAKE ACTION

Visit decision makers

- Clearly communicate what you want and need.
- Stay in regular contact.
- Determine if they will support your efforts.
- Invite them to PTA sponsored events and meetings.
- Make sure that the decision maker has your correct contact information.

Provide information

- Offer the PTA as a resource for the decision maker and staff.
- Describe the resources you have available issue briefs, brochures, programs, etc.

Conduct planned activities and events

- May include rallies, lobby days, walks, polls, media blitz, etc.
- Spread activities over time to keep interest peaked.

Monitor the progress of the issue

- Attend meetings and hearings.

Focus your efforts on decision makers who are undecided.

EVALUATE

Celebrate your successes

- Even if your issue failed, celebrate any movement toward your goal.

Analyze your efforts

- What went right? What went wrong?
- Brainstorm about what you can do to overcome the same obstacles the next time.

Identify the lessons learned

- Who are your allies and who was not willing to help?
- What information and strategies were most effective and worth the time and effort?



COMMUNICATING WITH LAWMAKERS

Working with Legislators

- Know your legislators. Find out their committee assignments. Know their background.
- Know your legislators' positions. Examine their voting records. Get on their mailing lists.
- Get acquainted with the legislator's staff. Know who handles specific issues. Visit the staff in the district office.
- Begin the lobbying process early. Start before any bill appears in the legislature.
- If your issue is already in a bill, know the bill name and number.
- Select only one or two issues. Stick with the PTA positions.
- Don't be intimidated by the legislator or by questions that you can't answer. Tell them that you will get back to them with the answer.
- Be respectful and don't create a position that will force the legislator to become defensive.
- Be explicit about what action you want the legislator to take on your behalf. Leave information on your position.
- Follow up on your visit. Write a letter to your legislator thanking him/her for meeting with you and reinforcing your position.

Using the Media

- Taking your message to the public means using all the media opportunities available the most effective manner:
- Be concise, specific and factual when discussing your ideas.
- Present details about the local impact of your concern, especially how it impacts children.
- Be an information resource that can be relied on to have the most up-to-date, factual information concerning the issue.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know an answer. Get the information to the person requesting it as soon as possible.
- Try to use newspapers as a key media. If they don't cover the issue as a news story, use letters to the editors or editorials.
- Be prepared if the media contacts you. If you are not prepared to discuss an item with them, ask if you can call back.

Letters and Postcards

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

Avoid form letters whenever possible. Other suggestions include:

- Stick to one subject.
- Give the PTA position.
- Explain what action you want to happen.
- Show how the issue will affect the legislator's constituents.
- Mention that you are a constituent.
- Reference how many students or voters you represent.
- Provide your contact information.

Calls, Emails and Faxes

These are effective, especially when timing is critical and a policy maker's support or vote is needed immediately. 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 aide by name.
- State that you are from the lawmaker's district.
- Give the bill number and name.
- Explain why the issue is important to your PTA.
- Ask the legislator to vote in your favor.
- If phoning, write down your speaking points in advance and take notes on what was said.



RESOLUTIONS

What is a Resolution?

Resolutions are directives for action. They call special attention to a critical need or concern and provide the foundation for advocacy and lobbying efforts.

A resolution consists of whereas and resolved statements. The whereas, statements describe the issue, provide background information and give the reasons for the resolution. The resolved statements indicate the action called for and express the opinion of the group.

Who may submit a Resolution to the Louisiana PTA?

Resolutions addressing issues upon which the Louisiana PTA has not previously taken a stand are submitted by units, districts or the Louisiana PTA and are voted upon at the annual convention.

Resolution Requirements

- Must be in harmony with PTA purposes and policies.
- Must be submitted by a local unit, district or the Louisiana PTA board of directors.
- Must be of statewide concern and not be represented by present resolutions.
- Must be accompanied by background material and a brief narrative summary of that material. Documentation should be sufficient to convince anyone without previous knowledge of the subject of the need for the resolution.
- Be written in language appropriate for consideration.

Procedure for Submission

- Type resolution in proper form. See the end of this section for a sample.
- Have the president, legislative chair, and secretary of the submitting body sign the resolution.
- Send to the Louisiana PTA office postmarked on or before February 1st.

Adoption of a Resolution

Once passed by delegates attending convention, the resolution becomes part of the legislative platform of Louisiana PTA. This allows units and districts to advocate on the issue. Once a position is established, it is expected that all PTAs will support the decision of the majority. PTAs that do not support a position may remain silent on the issue. It is expected, however, that they will not act in opposition to a PTA position. This is standard practice in democratic organizations.

Issues that affect only the local unit area can be studied and a resolution can be adopted by that PTA. In this instance, the PTA forms a committee, studies the issue, determines the action plan, and brings that plan to the local PTA which must adopt it, amend it and then adopt it, or defeat it. The committee's recommendation is the motion, or resolution. Once adopted, the general membership should approve a campaign that allows the unit to advocate for the issue.

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

EDUCATION

ACCOUNTABILITY

Support of:

- continued funding to support remediation, tutoring, school improvement, and other accountability initiatives.
- general continued implementation and improvements in the Louisiana Accountability program in accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind legislation.
- all schools, including charter schools, receiving public funding be held accountable according to the Louisiana School and District Accountability System.
- reduction in the overall high school dropout rate.

Resolutions in support of Accountability

- 1992 National PTA Resolutions
- 1989 LEAP Testing for Non-Public Students

TEACHERS

Support of:

- increased number of qualified teachers, especially in areas of critical shortages such as math, science, special education, and early childhood education.
- increased number of certified teachers, especially in low performing schools.
- increased retention of certified and qualified teacher through increased pay, improved working conditions, professional certification stipends and other incentives.

Position Statement in support of Teachers

- 1991 Statewide Teacher Assessment/ Evaluation

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Support of:

- increased awareness of need for and number enrolled in early childhood education, especially in low income families.

Resolutions in support of Early Childhood Education

- 1998 Early Childhood Education
- 1990 Financing Our Public Schools

SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Against the use of government funds to send students to private and/or parochial schools.

Position Statement in support of Anti-Vouchers

- 1992 Choice; Opposing the Voucher System for Education

FUNDING

Support of:

- increase in MFP funding to compensate for increases in employer contribution rates for teacher retirement and group insurance premiums.
- inclusion of adequate capital outlay funding for school buildings and school related facilities.

Resolutions in support of Funding

- 1988 (1984 & 1985) Public Education Funding 1991 Long Range Plan and Funding Mechanism for School Capital Improvements
- 1991 Revised MFP Formula

HEALTH AND SAFETY

OBESITY

Support of:

- increased education of the public to the dangers of childhood obesity and ways to prevent or correct obesity in children.
- continued support of physical education in the schools.
- Addressing minimum nutritional requirements of foods served and available on school campuses.

Resolutions in support of Decreasing Obesity

- National PTA Resolution Cholesterol in Children
- National PTA Resolution Nutritional Eating Requirements in Our Schools to Combat Childhood Obesity

BACKPACK ISSUES

Support of:

- increased funding to ensure classroom sets of textbooks for each school.
- education of students on the proper way to wear school backpacks.

Resolution in support of Backpack Issues

- 2003 Backpack Resolution

BULLYING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Support of:

- increased education of teachers, parents, and students of the continued existence of bullying and the problems resulting thereof.
- continued support and funding for counselors and other personnel for the purpose of conflict resolution.

Resolutions in support of Bullying and Conflict Resolution

- 1990 NPTA Discrimination and Harassment of Students in Schools

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Support of:

- development of after-school programs and activities for children who would otherwise be home alone, thereby reducing the number of crimes by and against children.

Resolution in support of After-School Programs

- 2004 National PTA Resolution After-School Programs

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Support of:

- continued involvement of parents in every aspect of their children's education
- increased support from federal, state, and local government, the BESE Board, and local school boards for parent involvement and education
- establishment, evaluation and improvement of parental involvement plans for every school

Resolutions in support of Parental Involvement

- 1991 Working Parent Involvement Provision
- 1992 National PTA Resolution Parental Involvement in Site-Based Shared Decision Making
- 1994 Parental Involvement

FORMAT OF A RESOLUTION

The following is a sample resolution, showing the correct structure, punctuation, and form. For additional information, refer to *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*.

Whereas, The Preamble includes statements of fact or background relating to the reasons for the action proposed in the "Resolved" clauses or information that is not common knowledge or that may be overlooked if not stated; and,

Whereas, The action taken on a resolution is action only on the motion contained in the "Resolved" clauses; now therefore be it

Resolved, That any resolutions that are proposed for consideration by convention delegates be received in the Louisiana PTA Office no later than February 1st, and be it further

Resolved, That it be directed that resolutions submitted to the Louisiana PTA for consideration shall follow this sample resolution in structure, punctuation, and form; and be it further

Resolved, That such resolutions meeting all established criteria be presented to convention delegates for consideration at said convention.

Title

WHEREAS, The _____
_____; and

WHEREAS, The _____
_____; and

WHEREAS, The _____
_____; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That _____
_____; and be it further

RESOLVED, The _____
_____.

Submitted by: _____

SAMPLE RESOLUTION

(The following resolution was adopted at the 2016 Louisiana PTA Convention.)

Resolution on Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program to Combat Childhood Obesity

Whereas, The need to provide quality physical education and other physical activity opportunities for young people has intensified in recent years due to the growing national epidemic of obesity; and

Whereas, Physical activity at all ages reduces risks of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. The 60 million school-age children and youth have the potential to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values that can lead to a life of physically active and healthy living; and

Whereas, *The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recommend that children and adolescents aged 6-17 years should have 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity each day; and

Whereas, A Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP), supported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and SHAPE America, is a multi-component approach by which school districts and schools use all opportunities for students to be physically active, meet the nationally-recommended 60 minutes of physical activity each day, and develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be physically active for a lifetime; and

Whereas, A CSPAP reflects strong coordination and partnership across all stakeholders: quality physical education as the foundation; physical activity before, during, and after school; staff involvement; and family and community engagement; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Louisiana PTA, of the State of Louisiana, and its constituent associations urges school districts and schools to implement a multi-component CSPAP; and be it

Resolved, That the Louisiana PTA, of the State of Louisiana, and its constituent associations, support increasing the mandatory amount as stated in Louisiana Legislature Act 286, Year 2009: Each public elementary school that includes any of the grades kindergarten through eight shall provide at least thirty minutes each school day of quality moderate to vigorous physical activity for students; and be it further

Resolved, That the Louisiana PTA, of the State of Louisiana, and its constituent associations, support daily physical education programs as an integral part of children's education.

SAMPLE RESOLUTION

(The following resolution was adopted at the 2014 Louisiana PTA Convention.)

Louisiana PTA Resolution Against Bullying

Whereas, Bullying in schools and at related school sponsored events is a pervasive problem that can have serious negative consequences for the school climate and for the right of students to learn in safe environment without fear, and one that can have negative lifelong consequences on the bully, the student who is bullied, as well as those who witness bullying; and

Whereas, Bullying is comprised of direct behaviors such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, stealing and cyber bullying, that are initiated by one or more students against another student, as well as indirect behaviors such as spreading rumors and acting in other ways to cause a student to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion, with all such behaviors, direct or indirect, amounting to physical or psychological intimidation occurring repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse that lead to life threatening situations.

Whereas, Bullying for too long has gone ignored and unchallenged, with parents, who are often unaware of the bullying problem, neglecting to talk about it with their children; with students feeling that adult intervention is infrequent and ineffective and will only bring more harassment from bullies; and with some adults viewing bullying as a harmless rite of passage that is best ignored; and

Whereas, Those who stand by passively watching or actively encouraging bullying are also affected by these hostile acts; they encourage bullying by creating an audience, they may become desensitized to cruelty, they may learn to imitate bullying behavior and become bullies themselves, and/or they may be fearful for their own safety, adding to their own insecurity; now therefore be it

Resolved, That Louisiana PTA, of the State of Louisiana, and its constituent organizations, does by virtue of this resolution, and in support of Louisiana Legislature Act 861, Year 2012 and other policies and programs that address the prevention, intervention, and elimination of bullying; and be it

Resolved, That Louisiana PTA and its constituent organizations endeavor, via education literature, programs, and projects for parents, students and school personnel, to bring about an atmosphere of zero tolerance for bullying behavior, and an attitude that bullying behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in homes, schools, playgrounds, buses, school activities, or any place children congregate; and be it further

Resolved, That Louisiana PTA and its constituent organizations work with the appropriate agencies, organizations and the Louisiana School Boards, in a state effort support Louisiana Legislative Act 861, to inform the general public about the risks and cost of bullying for both the bully, the student who is bullied, as well as those who witness bullying, and bring about a change in societal attitudes toward bullying.

SAMPLE RESOLUTION

(The following resolution was adopted at the 2007 Louisiana PTA convention.)

SALARY INCREASES FOR TEACHERS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL

- Whereas,** Increasing the salaries for teachers and other employees is a top priority; and
- Whereas,** Recruiting and retaining the best classroom teachers is a major factor in improving student achievement; and
- Whereas,** Louisiana classroom teachers' salaries currently rank among the lowest in the nation; and
- Whereas,** Local school boards do not have sufficient revenues to provide the funds necessary to significantly raise these salaries; and
- Whereas,** A major initiative has been proposed which will require no additional tax due to money reserves in the state budget that could be used to raise employees' salaries to the Southeast Regional average; and
- Whereas,** Teachers have increased accountability under the federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act; therefore be it
- Resolved,** That the Louisiana PTA support a major salary initiative which will significantly raise the salaries of all classroom teachers and support personnel in the public elementary and secondary schools throughout the state of Louisiana; and be it further
- Resolved,** That copies of this resolution be sent to the Louisiana Legislature, the Governor, State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Louisiana School Board Association.