2018–2019 Official Local PTA Leader Kit

Advocacy Quick Reference Guide
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Welcome to the Advocacy Guide

National PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States. This guide shares tips and best practices to be an effective advocate for every child—by educating communities and advocating at all levels of government the PTA way.

This guide provides tips and resources to support PTA advocacy, including the roles and responsibilities of an Advocacy or Legislative Chair, National PTA policy priorities, how to develop an advocacy plan, how PTAs can support elections, and tips for communicating with elected officials.

Key points to remember:

- **Every PTA member is an advocate for children.** We are engaged in advocacy every time we support and speak up for children.
- **PTA advocacy changes lives.** PTA has a long, successful history of influencing policy to promote children's education, health and well-being—resulting in child labor laws, school lunch programs, and much more.
- **We need your voice!** Working together, we can continue to make a difference for all children.

Please visit [PTA.org](http://PTA.org) and [PTAkit.org](http://PTAkit.org) for additional Advocacy resources.
What is Advocacy?

National PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States. But what is advocacy? For the purposes of PTA, advocacy is supporting and speaking up for children—in schools, in communities, and before government bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children.

All PTA Members can be advocates

In fact, you may be an advocate already! You are engaging in advocacy whenever you:

- Speak up for your child. Advocacy is happening every time you reach out to a teacher or school administrator to address a concern about your child's education. This could be as simple as attending a parent-teacher conference, checking in with the teacher about a low test score, or requesting a meeting with your principal and other school staff to discuss your child's disability and how the school can help.
- Take action to improve conditions for all children at your school. A group of concerned parents might write a letter or request a meeting with school administration to discuss a safety issue affecting children on their route to school. Your PTA might organize a "town hall" meeting about school lockdown procedures, dress codes, or nutrition in the cafeteria, ask to review the principal's continuous improvement plan, or request a seat on the school's parent advisory committee.
- Call on your community to respond to an urgent public policy matter. Occasionally, your state or National PTA will issue an alert that a pending piece of legislation has serious implications for public education. Local PTA leaders are in a unique position to educate and mobilize their members to speak up for children's needs.

Even a few minutes can make a difference

You can have a significant impact in a short amount of time. When a decision-maker receives five calls, emails or letters on an issue, he or she knows the public is concerned about it. Below are some quick ways to advocate on behalf of our children:

If you have.............. You can....................

5 minutes Vote, send an email, or make a phone call to an elected official
10 minutes Share a concern with your child's teacher or principal
15 minutes Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper
30 minutes Meet with your legislator at his/her office
1 hour Educate yourself about the candidates running for office in your jurisdiction and their positions on public education
1-3 hours Attend your local school board meeting, or a city council meeting when education is on the agenda
Welcome to the role of Advocacy/Legislative Chair!

Working in partnership with other PTA leaders, the PTA Advocacy Chair informs your membership about education issues and PTA legislative goals, and encourages and helps PTA members to become effective advocates. No legislative experience is needed -- just a desire to get involved and help organize efforts on behalf of our children. Plenty of help is available. If you take each of these steps in (roughly) your first month in office, you’ll have the resources you need and be off to a fantastic start!

Plug In. Your State PTA and National PTA are here to help and support you. Getting connected right away will make your job much easier! Here’s how:

- **Contact your State PTA.** Provide your State PTA with your name and contact information. Ask to be connected with the state Advocacy Chair, Legislative Director, or a similar position. Be sure to inquire about any trainings available at the state level. Visit your state PTA website.
- **Explore National PTA Resources.** Start with this kit, but learn more from National PTA through eLearning courses, the Advocacy Toolkit, One Voice Blog, and more! Consider attending the National PTA Legislative Conference that takes place each spring in Washington, D.C.
- **Sign up for alerts and email updates.** Begin with the PTA Takes Action Center. Also sign up for email updates from National PTA’s Advocacy Insider Newsletter and from your school district, PTA Council, PTA District, and State PTA.

Gather. Make sure to collect any materials from the previous Advocacy/Legislative Chair or your PTA President soon after taking office to be sure that files are not lost in the transition. If a procedure book for Advocacy activities does not exist, start one now. Records to gather include:

- **Your PTA Bylaws** (and any accompanying standing rules), to find important guidelines for advocacy, lobbying, elections and more.
- **Current year’s budget** to guide any immediate expenditures, as well as prior year budgets to help you get ready to draft an Advocacy budget for next year.
- **Past legislative updates** to bring you up to speed on current issues.
- **Last year’s advocacy plan.** Advocacy requires sustained effort from year to year, so you’ll want to know what’s already in progress.
- **Any plans, procedures or evaluations from past activities** such as rallies, candidates' forums and letter writing campaigns.

Learn. National PTA’s Advocacy Toolkit is a great place to start for an overview of the legislative process. Familiarize yourself with the National PTA policy priorities. Then, get to know your federal, state, and local decision-makers and their calendars. Questions to explore:

- **Who are your elected representatives?** Find contact information for your school board members, city council members, county/parish representatives, State legislators, and U.S. Senators and Representatives.
- **How do decisions get made?** What are the dates of the legislative session? When and where do your city/county governments and school board meet? Where can you find meeting agendas and minutes?
- **When are elections held?** Which positions will be on the ballot this year?

Build Your Team. You don’t have to do this alone! If one does not already exist, consider forming a Legislative/Advocacy committee. Look for volunteers who are interested in the legislative process and speaking up for children. Consider recruiting members with expertise or experience in government and communications.
Advocacy Roles & Responsibilities

An Advocacy or Legislative Chair serves as the link between PTA Policy Priorities at the national and state levels, and the concerns of your local members. Your primary responsibility is to inform your members about education issues and PTA legislative goals, and to encourage and help them to become effective advocates for children.

Even if you are brand new to advocacy, you can be a catalyst for change by informing and inspiring your fellow members. As you get more comfortable in the role, you will find a wealth of resources to support your deeper investment!

Below are some typical activities of an Advocacy or Legislative Chair:

**Warming Up (Year 1):**

- **Request that advocacy be on the agenda at every PTA meeting.** Share what you’re learning with your board and general membership. This is a great way to spark interest and find committee members and/or your successor!
- **Attend school board meetings** and city council meetings when education issues are on the agenda. Invite other members to attend with you, and speak up in accordance with PTA legislative positions.
- **Establish/maintain an email or phone or contact list** to pass on important, time-critical information to your members. Encourage members to sign up for National PTA Take Action Alerts.
- **Attend parent advisory committee (PAC) meetings** to stay in touch with school improvement efforts and help ensure the PTA and PAC are working in tandem.
- **Maintain current contact information for all elected representatives** in your area: U.S. Senators, U.S. Representatives, State legislators, county representatives, city council members, and school board members.
- **Attend national and state trainings** to learn more about advocacy and issues affecting children.
- **Represent members** at the state annual legislative assembly, a state child advocacy day, the annual National PTA Legislative Conference, and other gatherings.
Hitting Your Stride (Year 2 and beyond):

- **Identify policy issues of interest** to your PTA members. Monitor those issues through local and national media, school board meetings and PTA resources.
- **Provide regular legislative reports** at PTA general membership and board meetings. Summarize these for periodic updates in your PTA or school newsletter. Consider hosting a presentation on advocacy issues.
- **Advocate for policies** that are aligned with National and State PTA legislative priorities by organizing a letter-writing, email or call-in campaign. Create a sample letter, email, or phone script for members to follow.
- **Encourage active participation in elections.** For more about this, [check out the Elections Page at pta.org/election](http://pta.org/election).
- **Be a resource for members** about local, state, and national issues that matter to children. Educate members about advocacy, using materials in this kit and on [PTA.org](http://pta.org).
- **Meet with elected officials** to discuss education issues, and/or invite them to visit your school. Seek to build an ongoing relationship with a few key legislators.
- **Network with other PTA Advocacy/Legislative leaders** in your area to share ideas and collaborate on common goals.
- **Organize a candidates forum**, working with PTA council and other local community organizations preceding elections for public office.

To learn more about the responsibilities of an Advocacy/Legislative Chair for your PTA, talk with your PTA President or [state PTA Advocacy Chair](http://state.pta.org/).
National PTA Policy Priorities

Founded in 1897, PTA has a long, successful history of influencing federal policy to promote the education, health and well-being of all children - resulting in kindergarten classes, child labor laws, school lunch programs, a juvenile justice system and strengthened parent-teacher relationships.

Today’s PTA continues that legacy.

Legislative Priorities

The National PTA's Legislative Checklist for the 115th Congress and PTA Advocacy Changes Lives outline the policy priorities that National PTA and its constituent associations believe are critical to ensuring all children reach their highest potential. The checklist features the following policy areas:

- Elementary and secondary education
- Special Education
- Federal investments in education
- Early learning and childhood education
- Child health and safety
- Gun safety and violence prevention
- Juvenile justice and delinquency prevention
- Education technology and student data privacy
- Post-secondary access and opportunity

The priorities have been selected based on the following criteria:

- Timeliness (Is the issue being considered by Congress and the administration?)
- Opportunities for National PTA to provide leadership and expertise to Congress
- Alignment with National PTA’s mission
- Potential to achieve meaningful policy change that will produce positive results for children and their families

Remember, your unit does not have to tackle every issue all at once. A better approach is to choose one or two topics that affect your school’s families, teachers and students. National PTA position statements and resolutions come directly from volunteers and are the roots of all National PTA public policy positions. Where a position statement or resolution exists, State and local PTAs are free to advocate on issues but should ensure consistency with the existing document. PTAs cannot actively engage in advocacy that goes against National PTA position statements.
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 created a unique opportunity for families and PTA members to influence how states will tailor education systems and improve schools to better meet the needs of all students.

States are implementing new education plans, which will look different in every state. National PTA is seeking to support and empower families to be active participants in the state and local implementation of ESSA, to ensure equity and opportunity for all students.

PTA.org offers roadmaps for state, local and parent involvement in ESSA implementation. Those and other resources can be found on National PTA’s dedicated ESSA webpage.

Reach out to your school district and state PTA to learn more about where your state is in this process and how you can get involved.

Some PTA resources that you may find helpful:

- ESSA: What Does This New Law Mean for my Child?
  - (English)
  - (En Espanol)
- What’s the Difference? No Child Left Behind and the Every Student Succeeds Act
- Family Engagement in ESSA
  - (English)
  - (En Espanol)
- Statewide Family Engagement Centers
- ESSA Questions PTA Advocates Should Ask

### Family Engagement in the Education Act and ESEA Bill

- **February 3, 2015**
  - The Student Success Act (S. 3) is introduced in the U.S. House
- **February 26, 2015**
  - The U.S. House of Representatives begins floor debate on H.R. 7
- **March 2, 2015**
  - Family Engagement in Education Act HR 7 introduced in the U.S. House
- **April 7, 2015**
  - The Family and Child Solutions Act S. 1775 introduced in the U.S. Senate
- **July 7, 2015**
  - The Reauthorization of Title I, Part A, and Part B, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
- **July 14, 2015**
  - Statewide Family Engagement Centers (PTE) amendment passes on Senate floor vote
- **July 16, 2015**
  - The Family and Child Solutions Act S. 1775, as amended, passed by 77–22 vote
- **December 2, 2015**
  - The House passes ESSA by a vote of 254–174. The Senate passed ESSA by a vote of 81–19
College and Career Readiness

PTA believes that all students - no matter where they live - should receive a high quality education and graduate high school with the skills they need to succeed at the college or career of their choice.

States have been implementing college and career readiness standards, curriculum and assessments over the past several years. They are important components of the accountability sections of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

It is critical for PTA leaders to work with local and state decision-makers to ensure the parent voice is heard and progress continues. There are many resources on PTA.org to support you in your efforts:

- College and Career Readiness
- Member Education Event Toolkit
- College and Career Readiness Initiative
- Academic Standards
- Common Core State Standards
- State Assessments

Developing an Advocacy Plan

We all have wishes and dreams for our children. When it comes to advocacy, planning is key to making those dreams a reality.

The new school year is a great time for your PTA to consider what opportunities exist in your school, district, city, state and nationally to improve the lives of all children. As your students head back to school, take some time to plan for how your PTA will advocate for every child with one voice.

Why create an Advocacy Plan?

There are many reasons for a PTA to create an advocacy plan, and the basic approach is the same for each. Your unit might create a plan to:

- Identify and advocate for the local issues of greatest important to your members
- Engage your membership to respond to time-critical legislative alerts from National PTA or your State PTA
- Participate in school, district and state improvement activities (per ESSA)
- Register voters or host candidate forums in an election year

Remember, your unit does not have to tackle every issue all at once. Choose one or two topics that affect families, teachers and students in your community, and work to build support for PTA’s position.
How to Create Your Advocacy Plan

This strategy chart can help ensure that your tactics stay focused on your goals and objectives.

**Step 1: Identify Your Goal.**

*What issues are currently causing concern in your school or district?* Perhaps you want healthier food in your students' cafeteria, more family and community events, or safer routes to school that encourage walking and biking.

*Or maybe your PTA wants to work with your State PTA* to let state and national leaders know your thoughts on school funding, or to support ESSA implementation.

*Set goals for what you’d like to achieve.* Keep in mind that state and local PTAs are free to advocate on issues but should seek guidance from National PTA position statements and resolutions, where available, to ensure state and local advocacy is consistent with National PTA position statements.

**Step 2: Consider your capacity.**

*Before going further with planning, take stock of your PTA’s current capacity for advocacy activities.* Do you have enough help, or might you need to expand your team? Do you have an adequate budget for the goals you have in mind? What other events or issues may pull resources from your project?

**Step 3: Connect with constituents, allies, and opponents.**

If community interest already exists around the issue, this is an excellent opportunity for your PTA to raise its visibility by taking a stand, connecting with allies, and organizing members for change.

If the community is not aware of the issue, your PTA has the opportunity to educate the public about these important issues.

**Step 4: Identify and target decision-makers.**

Know who has the power to make a change. They are your primary target audience.

You might have secondary target audiences that include allies, opponents, people who are undecided about the issue, or those who have the ability to influence decision-makers.
Step 5: Design your tactics.

Determine the best ways to reach your target audience (the decision-makers). Will you host an event, conduct a social media campaign, or organize members to send letters and emails or make phone calls? What messages will be most effective for the groups you need to reach?

Create discrete tasks that can be completed one step at a time. Trying to take on too much at once can be frustrating and cause you to lose sight of your end goal. Be sure to celebrate the completion of each step, no matter how small!

General Planning Tips:

- **Be realistic.** Make sure the tasks you are undertaking are within the abilities of your PTA. Identify issues that are small enough in scope that the local PTA unit can address them in a reasonable manner, but will have a noticeable impact on families and students in your school or district. Or, identify interim goals and/or team up with others for a bigger impact.

- **Communicate your goals.** PTA seeks to engage families in education. Make sure you are communicating your initiatives widely through various media (social media, local newspaper, newsletters, etc.) so that people in your area know how they can get involved.

- **Be persistent.** Changing policy takes time and sustained effort. Give yourself and your PTA volunteers time to get organized. Don’t take “no” for an answer!
Elections

Casting a ballot is one of the most important things you can do to advocate for your children. Being educated about candidates for public office and what they stand for is critical to advocating effectively.

When PTA members are informed, we become a powerful voice for all children - and local PTA units have a role in supporting informed decisions at the ballot box!

There are many ways that PTA members can participate in the election process:

**PTAs can:**

- Host candidate forums
- Publish candidates’ responses in a questionnaire
- Educate candidates about an issue (as long as all information is provided to all candidates in a race)
- Support or oppose a ballot measure (in alignment with PTA’s mission, purpose, resolutions, and positions)
- Help register new voters
- Remind and encourage members to vote

Because of our [501(c)(3) status](#), there are a few things that PTA cannot do.

**PTAs cannot:**

- Endorse a candidate or a political party for public office
- Make a campaign contribution
- Invite only one candidate or political party in an election to speak to the PTA
- Ask candidates to sign pledges on any issue (tacit endorsement)
- Tell PTA members to only vote for a candidate who supports a certain position, or rate candidates according to their position on an issue
- Distribute any campaign materials on behalf of a candidate
- Wear campaign buttons or T-shirts during a PTA meeting
Communicating with Elected Officials

Communicating with elected officials is an important way to make your PTA’s voice heard. PTA wants decision-makers to view our members as a useful and knowledgeable resource when it comes to matters concerning the well-being of children.

Building this relationship is done in a variety of ways, including:

- Letters, email and phone calls
- In-person meetings in a legislators’ office
- Hosting school visits

No matter which of these strategies are a part of your advocacy plan, National PTA offers resources to help:

- Corresponding with Members of Congress - includes tips and sample scripts for you to use
- Conducting Visits with Members of Congress - includes tips for before, during, and after your visit
- Hosting Site Visits for Members of Congress - includes pointers for planning, scheduling, alerting the media, hosting, and keeping National PTA informed