

PTA communications and public relations should help PTA members and the general public understand PTA is

- A volunteer organization of parents, teachers, students and other concerned citizens; and
- An action-oriented organization working for the well-being of children and youth.

PUBLICIZE PTA TO THE COMMUNITY

PTA has enjoyed excellent name recognition with the public for many years. It is important to remember that although this recognition exists, each community may not be familiar with the actual functions of PTA.

Creating a public relations campaign that says “PTA cares and is here to help” will communicate to the community that the PTA truly does make a difference, and this will generate an increase in membership.

Contact newspapers and radio and television stations to stimulate the media’s interest in covering PTA events and programs. Do not forget the many community websites and online bulletin boards now available. All types of coverage will benefit membership by increasing community awareness of PTA’s projects.

PTA TALKING POINTS

When speaking about the PTA, one often has very little time to make the point heard. These talking points and facts will help to demonstrate the strength of the PTA.

The more these messages are repeated, the more likely it is that they will be heard and repeated by those PTA is are trying to influence.

The PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer association working on children and youth issues. In California alone, there are more than one million PTA members.

The PTA represents every child in California schools. PTA members work for “*everychild.onevoice.*”

The PTA is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian, and noncommercial organization that promotes the welfare of children and youth in home, school, community and place of worship.

The PTA encourages communication and cooperation between parents and schools to ensure that children and youth receive the best possible physical, mental, social and spiritual education.

The PTA develops educational programs for parents, teachers, students and the general public.

The PTA fosters leadership skills in both adults and students. PTA volunteers are leaders and advocates in their schools and communities.

CREATE A PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

The following steps should get one started in planning a successful public relations campaign.

Step One

Incorporate the statewide membership theme, “*everychild.onevoice.*” and PTA logo into the public relations campaign. This will show a unity of effort and purpose, as well as demonstrate the participation in a national organization.

Refer to the Style Guide 6.1.5, 260 for correct PTA terminology and formatting.

Step Two

Develop a press kit that contains information on the history, current projects, and accomplishments of the local PTA.

Step Three

Call local newspapers and radio and television stations to find out who covers education and child welfare issues. Give each reporter a call to introduce oneself and mention adding his or her name to the mailing list. Then mail a press kit with a follow-up note to each person. Remember that cable TV services are required to provide some local access. They may offer additional exposure by airing public service announcements and covering the news in PTA’s press releases.

Step Four

Try to maintain monthly personal contact with media contacts. Take the time to build a working relationship.

Step Five

Alert media contacts about upcoming events, so that they can schedule time to cover the PTA. Keep phone and mailing lists up-to-date.

PLANNING FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Identify the Target Audience. When thinking about communications activities, it is important to consider what one wants to reach. If trying to reach students, the plan may be very different than if one needs to reach parents.

Choose the Medium. Once one has agreed whom one needs to reach, it is important to think about the best way to reach them. Determine the ideal method of communication with the audience. There is no universal choice. Depending on the audience and the message, the method could be anything from creating a website to making a phone call.

Prepare the Message. Think through what one needs to say and how one should say it. Take the time to review and refine the PTA Talking Points (6.1.1, 259) to concisely convey the message. Consider what one wants the press or audience to understand, once you have finished communicating. All energy should be focused on making that message clear – discard all the rest.

GUIDELINES FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS

Adhere to PTA noncommercial, nonpartisan and nonsectarian policies (Background for Communications 6.2.2, 263 and Basic Policies for all PTAs 1.3, 16).

All material is to be cleared with the PTA president and school principal before printing. The principal is responsible for the accuracy of school information and compliance with the State Education Code and school district policy. The PTA president is responsible for the accuracy of PTA information and compliance with PTA policies.

Never present material critical of any individual or group. To do so may very well expose the PTA to a libel suit.

TRANSLATING MATERIALS

PTAs must work closely with the school to meet the language needs of all who receive information.

MEDIA OUTREACH

The first step to effectively reaching the media in the community is to create a list of media outlets and key reporters who may be interested in PTA's efforts. Creating this list is as easy as watching the news or reading the newspaper.

Keep a record of the reporters covering education, school, youth, and family issues in the local area. This research will make the job easier when looking for coverage.

The phone book is a good place to start looking for contact information. (Also contact the county office of education or school district public relations coordinator.)

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Before speaking to the media, make sure one understands and can concisely convey the answers to the following questions:

What is the problem?

What is the solution?

How will the solution impact the school and the children in it?

What does PTA want the media to report?

Who supports PTA's efforts? Why?

Who opposes PTA's efforts? Why?

MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

Plan talking points, and make them early and often. Remember, an interview is an opportunity to tell PTA's story and to make PTA's case. Prepare the points one would like to make in advance, and use every question as an opportunity to address PTA's agenda (Talking Points 6.1.1, 259).

One is a guest and an authority. One has been approached because one is a leader representing PTA. If the reporter asks questions one cannot answer because they are outside one's area of expertise, say, "I don't know, but I will get back to you in time for your deadline." In the meantime, consult with officers/chairmen who have the needed expertise.

Speak in a language everyone understands. Jargon, organization lingo, or abbreviations that may be familiar to PTA member may have no meaning to the general public.

Be positive, not defensive. Take the trouble to present the PTA's point of view in a positive manner. Resist any temptation to attack other organizations. Accusations or any perception by the reporter of conflict may preempt the rest of the interview.

Tell the truth. Factual information is a must. If a statement is made that is not true, refute it immediately and politely. Always correct the information in an informative and helpful manner.

Be brief, especially for broadcast (television or radio). Broadcast news is frequently presented in "sound bites," short, succinct phrases that capture the essence of a program or position on an issue.

Keep statements or responses to a couple of short sentences. Make PTA's point as often and as logically as possible. One may feel repetitive, but when the interview is edited, the clearest or most emotional statement is likely to be the one that is covered in the news.

SPEAKING IN SOUND BITES

As one develops answers to the questions above, it is important to keep messages short and simple in order to attract and sustain the attention of the audience. Whether speaking with a potential member, the media, or the school board, use sound bites to hold the audience's attention. Here are some tips to help one plan:

Speak to shared values. Stress themes about which the majority of people care.

Talk about what is at stake. Who is affected? What does this mean to people's lives?

Use reasonable language. Do not be afraid to take a strong position, but be sure to use mainstream language. Do not use jargon or acronyms.

Evoke pictures. If the speaker can make people see what one is discussing, the point will be more memorable and have more impact.

Take a stand and present a solution. The best messages do not just describe the problem, they also say what should be done about it.

-Adapted from Berkeley Media Studies Group and We Interrupt This Message.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

One of the most important places in the newspaper is the letters page. Through a letter to the editor, one can reinforce the PTA message and concisely state the PTA position on an issue. One can copy and distribute the printed letter to help others get a clear idea of the position.

In fact, getting PTA's position into the newspaper through a letter to the editor often gives the position additional credibility. Here are some tips to consider when writing this letter.

Explain why one is writing. If one is responding directly to an article one reads in the newspaper, state the article's headline and publication date.

Focus one's message. Limit the content to the one key point one wants the readers to remember.

Take a strong position. Editors look for fresh facts, honest statements of opinion, and creative points of view. Use facts and statistics to illustrate the urgency of PTA's point of view.

OPINION EDITORIALS

Opinion pages are read closely by a community's decision-makers. Opinion pieces (called "op-eds" because they are placed on the page opposite the editorial page) provide an opportunity to flesh out an argument for the importance and relevance of the issue and the proposed solution.

PLANNING THE OP-ED

What is the subject to be covered in one's op-ed piece?

Is there a local ally who could co-sign the op-ed?

What important examples or stories can be used to illustrate the importance of the problem?

What is the specific policy solution one wants to advocate?

What two or three key points would help to convince people that this is the right action to take?

What compelling facts or statistics help to make the case?

What metaphors or images might help to reinforce the point?

Which official PTA position statement, convention resolution, or issue-related guidelines apply? (See *Where We Stand* 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6, 130-212)

CREATING NEWS

News does not just happen, it is created. Here are five tips that may increase your chances for getting news coverage.

1. Make the story visually compelling. A picture is worth a thousand words. When planning an event for the media, identify visuals that illustrate the topic. Is the unit trying to increase funding for school facilities? Why not take reporters on a tour of rundown classroom? Point out the problems. Demonstrate the need for funding.
2. Piggyback on breaking news. Are schools a major issue in an upcoming election? Be prepared to be one of the experts and demonstrate that the PTA is a voice on the issues being debated. Take advantage of opportunities that can increase the profile of the PTA.
3. Tie-in the events to anniversaries and annual events. Whether or not in the PTA, the fall is "back-to-school" time. PTA membership drives are successful during this time period, in part because everyone is in the "back-to-school" mindset. Think about other events or dates related to schools and children that traditionally receive coverage. Find a way to tie PTA programs to those dates.
4. Special events. Announce speakers' forums, cultural events or other activities that may be of interest to a large audience. Invite local VIPs, and let the media know who will be coming.
5. To attract an editor to one's story, one needs a "hook" or "angle." Tell the story in a new way. It is not news to just say that California schools need more arts teachers. However, one can make it news if the only art teacher in the school just retired. A hook takes a story that has been told a hundred times and provides a new angle for telling it.

How one presents the story will determine whether the editor will assign the article to a reporter or throw it away.

MEDIA ADVISORIES

To draw attention to an event before it happens, consider issuing a Media Advisory between 7 and 10 days in advance. The structure is the same as a Press Release and is sent to local news media. Emphasize date, time, and location of the event and how to obtain more information.

PRESS RELEASES

At times, one will want to draw media attention to PTA activities in the community. To alert the media, it is best to use a traditional press release format. It is important to use the news release to answer the following questions concisely: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

News writing style is brief, simple, and to the point.

CLEAR ALL news releases with the president before sending to the media.

Whenever appropriate, incorporate news from current publications and news releases of the local PTA, district PTA, state and National PTA.

A news release should be faxed a couple of days before the event, with follow-up calls the day before the event. However, discuss the advance lead time required with local newspaper page editor; smaller newspapers may require a longer lead time. Include a hard copy of the release in the press kit on the day of the event (Sample Press Release Fig. 6-3, 274).

Each paragraph should not exceed four to five lines.

Double-space the text.

The whole release should not exceed one and a half pages.

Do not split paragraphs between pages.

Use the traditional format illustrated in *Toolkit* (Fig. 6-3, 274).

Every release should carry one's name as the contact for further information, one's telephone number, e-mail address, the date and, of course, the name of the PTA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Wallack, Larry and Lori Dorfman, Katie Woodruff, and Iris Diaz. *News for Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999.)

PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Date)

CONTACT

(Name)

(Phone Number)

(HEADLINE: KEEP IT SHORT & USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS)

1st paragraph: Briefly explain what is happening who is involved, and when and where it is taking place.

2nd paragraph: Why is this event significant and newsworthy?

3rd paragraph: Quote from an expert involved who emphasizes how significant the event is.

4th paragraph: More details on where and when the event is happening, if necessary.

5th paragraph +: Other pertinent details including, speakers' names and affiliations as well as descriptions of any visual details of the event that will provide photo opportunities for reporters.

MORE (if release goes to a second page)

(to indicate the end of a release)

PROCLAMATIONS

Proclamations are a way for elected officials to show their commitment to PTA. Encourage school district officials and local government to adopt a proclamation supporting PTA membership, PTA Founders Day, local PTA's charter anniversary, etc. (Sample Proclamation Fig. 3-8, 90).

PUBLIC RELATIONS COORDINATOR

Work with the unit's elected officers to develop an annual communications plan. The plan should complement the goals of the organization, including advocacy, education, and membership.

Be a source for the media; watch for opportunities for PTA officers to be interviewed on issues and programs the PTA has identified.

Create an awareness of PTA actions in the mass media (e.g., newspapers, radio, websites, TV, PSAs), emphasizing student/parent programs and projects.

Open avenues of communication in the local area through publicity in newspapers, magazines, radio, and television (both commercial and public access), and publicize the official PTA positions on issues, when deemed appropriate by the president and executive board.

Obtain and become familiar with the National PTA *Quick-Reference Guide* (Marketing & PR) and the *California State PTA Toolkit*. Subscribe to *PTA in California*, *The Communicator*, and *Our Children*. (Resources and Subscriptions, *California State PTA Toolkit*, Introduction xxxv.) The unit president has all these items. Cost of materials should be included in local unit budget.

Review www.capta.org and www.pta.org.

Meet with predecessor, if possible, to obtain the procedure book and to review procedures and other materials. These materials should include the following information: The name, address and contact person (or position) for local newspaper(s), local radio station(s), local TV and cable station(s) and other local news media, such as community bulletin boards, shopping news, school district newsletter, and County Office of Education newsletter.

Update local media list at the beginning of term and at least every six months. The school district Public Information Office and County Office of Education are valuable resources.

Keep in contact with council and district PTA's public relations chairs, attend workshops, and make reports as requested.

Let the local press know who one is. Learn the styles and deadlines of the local media and each media contact person in the area. The media should be aware of one as a source of factual information.

Assist the president and other officers in their preparation of remarks for media interviews. Always obtain the president's consent before agreeing to be interviewed.

CLEAR ALL press materials with the president before presentation to the media.

REPRESENTING PTA

As a PTA chairman, not only does one represent one unit, council or district PTA, but one is also a local representative of the California State PTA and National PTA.

CHAIRMEN SHOULD

Reflect the PTA's official positions.

Refrain from making statements that would commit one or one's organization to programs or projects upon which no action has been authorized or taken.

Build credibility as an individual so that one's comments are of value to the audience.

When one's personal opinion is requested (and it will be), be sure to qualify it as such.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Become knowledgeable about the organization – its structure and purpose – its positions and projects.

Keep abreast of current developments.

MAKING PTA TALKING POINTS ONE'S OWN

Whether talking to a reporter or a school board member, people are interested in having issues expressed in human terms. Personal stories are essential elements in producing compelling stories.

Talking points are only intended as guidelines for speaking on behalf of PTA. They can only be compelling when injected with personal stories. Make the talking points one's own by asking oneself:

How can my experience be part of these messages? How do these messages resonate with my experience as a teacher, a parent, a student, etc.?

Why am I so committed to this work? How did I get involved? What needs to be improved at our school(s) or in our community? Can I share those stories?

NEEDS TO LEARN

PTA's history; Purposes of the PTA, Mission Statement of the California State PTA; California State PTA Core Values; California State PTA Legislation Platform; and the PTA's basic policies, procedures, and programs (Know Your PTA 1.1, 3 and Legislation Platform 4.2.4, 122).

About the local media: who they are, who is interested in PTA issues, and how to contact them.

Current PTA information, publications, names of officers and chairmen, and schedule of events.

NECESSITIES

The addresses, and telephone numbers and e-mails of PTA officers and chairmen.

Helpful tools: fax machine and computer with internet access for distributing press materials.

Reference materials: grammar book, dictionary, thesaurus, *California State PTA Toolkit* and National PTA's *Quick-Reference Guide*.

PUBLICITY RECORD BOOK

The public relations coordinator is responsible for maintaining a publicity record book that includes newspaper clippings and copies of other publicity for the PTA year. This serves as a valuable reference for the incoming president and public relations chair, and, after a year, the book may be presented to the president whose term it covers.

The public relations chairman may assemble the record book, or this responsibility may be delegated. The public relations chairman in office should continue to save clippings until the new chairman takes over, so that the record is complete for twelve months.

Some council and district PTAs have guidelines to follow for assembling the contents of a publicity record book. Check with local council or district PTA public relations coordinator.

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