

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.

### **PURPOSES OF PTA PUBLICATIONS**

- Encourage involvement with the child in the home and in the school.
- Inform every family in the school of the aims and accomplishments of the unit.
- Encourage attendance at PTA meetings, and parent involvement in PTA projects and activities.
- Foster cooperation with the school in keeping parents informed about school functions, regulations and/or procedures on child-related issues;
- Inform the community about PTA activities and school functions.

### **PTA PUBLICATIONS**

- 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.
- Incorporate the statewide membership theme, “*everychild.onevoice.*” and PTA logo in communications. This will show a unity of effort and purpose, as well as demonstrate participation in a national organization.
- Avoid publishing the last name and phone number of a volunteer who handles PTA funds.
- Only publish a summary of actions taken from the PTA association meeting.
- Do not publish, without written permission, personal information about students or adults. This includes:
  - Photographs of students or adults (with/without first or full names);
  - Home addresses and/or telephone numbers of students or adults

- E-mail addresses of students or adults;
- Student or adult class schedules (e.g., “Artwork by John L., 3rd grade”).
- Date all materials.
- Always make it easy for the reader to identify and find the Publications Coordinator. List the following items:
  - Name of the unit, council or district PTA;
  - Contact information (units should use school address, council and district PTA should use office or mailing address);
  - Names of PTA levels to which one belongs (council and district PTA, California State PTA, National PTA).
  - Most important, include an e-mail address and phone number so that one can be reached for more information about the organization.
- Refer to the *California State PTA Toolkit, Style Guide* (6.1.5, 260) for correct PTA terminology and formatting.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING CONTENT**

- Feedback is necessary to find out whether the publication is achieving its goals. Take an opinion poll at an executive board meeting. Insert a questionnaire in several issues to learn which information is most helpful to readers.
- Encourage others to contribute to publications. Tell them how much space is available for articles. Offer suggestions to assist them in their efforts.
- Be on the alert for coming events that should be publicized. Go after stories.
- Report the results of events, publicize membership campaigns, or announce PTA award recipients.
- Remember, people do not read, they skim. Make sure the message is easy to find. Keep things brief and to the point. Strategically use bullets, quotes, charts, and graphics.
- Graphic design (both print and electronic) should be clean and simple. Avoid graphics that overwhelm the reader and distract from your content.
- Proofread everything!

### **TRANSLATING MATERIALS**

- PTAs must work closely with the school to meet the language needs of all who receive the publication.
- To translate information and materials, seek help from bilingual parents on the executive board, teachers or support personnel in the classrooms or the school district, or the foreign language departments at local high schools, community colleges and universities.

### Considerations for Year-Round Schools

- Develop a plan to reach all members whether they are on- or off-track.
- Time newsletters and flyers to be sent home right before track goes off and right after track returns.

### APPLYING THE NONCOMMERCIAL POLICY

Promoting sponsors through advertising in the communications is discouraged rather than forbidden. Advertising may generate taxable **unrelated business income**.

Talk with school principal. School districts may have policies that forbid students to carry home publications containing commercial advertising or forbid the electronic posting of commercial advertising on a school website.

Any advertising should be screened to ensure it meets PTAs high standards. This might mean that one accepts advertising from some businesses while rejecting others, which could create an embarrassing situation.

The California State PTA strongly advises the printing of a disclaimer:

The mention of any business or service in this publication does not imply an endorsement by the \_\_\_\_\_ PTA.

Become familiar with the noncommercial policy (Non-commercial Policy 1.3.1, 16).

The noncommercial policy should be applied with good judgment, discretion, and common sense. Recognize that it is not meant to prohibit all contact, cooperation, or partnerships with commercial businesses.

Avoid exploitation by individuals, businesses, and others who would appeal to the PTA's commitment to support schools by using the PTA newsletter or other publications.

### ACKNOWLEDGING ASSISTANCE

Thank funders and sponsors. One sentence should do it!

The Sunshine PTA newsletter (website) is printed (posted) courtesy of John Doe Printers.

The Sunshine PTA expresses grateful appreciation to John Doe Hardware for making this publication possible.

The Sunshine PTA expresses grateful appreciation to the following merchants for making this publication possible:

John Doe Hardware  
Mary Green Fabrics  
Romano Pizza

Express appreciation to those participating in or contributing to programs.

The Sunshine PTA thanks the Burger Place for their work with our students on the *Let's Do It! Recycling Program*.

Acknowledge donations of TV, radio, and public service facilities, if there is no further obligation.

The Sunshine PTA expresses thanks to Neighborhood Bank for the use of its parking lot for the car wash.

The Sunshine PTA wishes to thank KXYZ for the PTA membership promotion ads aired during our membership enrollment.

### PROMOTING FUNDRAISING

Each PTA must assess its own members' attitudes toward promoting fundraisers. It is acceptable to publicize a local pizza restaurant that has agreed to donate a percentage of its sales for a specific evening.

Sunshine PTA thanks Romano Pizza for the generous offer to donate 10 percent of all sales made May 5, 2002.

Collecting receipts and labels for specific PTA projects may require acknowledging certain commercial interests. Be as generic as possible.

Sunshine PTA will collect soup labels/cereal labels for the next semester. Call Jane Doe at 213.976.4567 for information.

### COPYRIGHT LAWS

PTA members expect those who publish their newsletters, printed materials, and websites to abide by the copyright laws and to republish articles and reproduce art in an ethical manner.

Following are some simple rules regarding the use of articles and art that editors should observe:

Sharing computer software violates federal copyright laws.

- Permission should be secured to republish anything from another source. Does the publication or the art have a small © on it with a name indicating the holder of the copyright? Permission may be requested by letter or, if time is short, by telephone, with a follow-up letter.
- The letter of request (Sample Request for Use of Copyrighted Material Fig. 6-1, 265) or a record of the telephone call to the originator should be kept on file. The reply or a record of it should be kept on file. Print out a hard copy of any "granted" permission received via e-mail.
- Only a brief part of a written work may be quoted. This can be quoted only once, unless a new request is sent. Credit must be given to the source of the material.
- If it is impossible to secure permission before use, a PTA publication, as an educational publication, may use only brief quotes or a short section of an article. As a matter of ethics, a letter of request should be sent, even though it may be after publication.
- Laws are strict in the case of items that are creative in nature (e.g., art, literature, poetry, cartoons, and comics). Secure permission in advance in such cases. Poetry is considered public domain material 52 years after the year of copyright.

- California State PTA articles and artwork may be used by unit, council and district PTAs without permission. Read National PTA materials carefully to determine when permission to republish is required, and always credit the source.

### NONPROFIT MAILING PERMITS

To mail newsletters and printed materials, a PTA may apply for the special nonprofit bulk mailing rate. Fill out application Form PS-3624 and submit to the post office.

Two hundred or more identical pieces of mail (or a minimum of 50 pounds) are required for bulk mail rates. No handwritten materials can be included, or it becomes First Class material, and the unit must pay accordingly.

Contact the U.S. Postal Service for packaging and rate requirements (Nonprofit Mailing Permits 6.2.4, 267).

### NEWSLETTERS

In a four- (or eight-) page newsletter, use pages 1, 3 and 4 (or 8) for the most important articles. Use articles, pull quotes, or graphics in groups of twos and threes on a page. An unbalanced page is the strongest. Try to create a good clear direction for the reader's eye to follow on each page — usually a “Z.”

Two columns are easiest to read and take up less space. Three columns will add design flexibility and allow the use of photos.

White space in the design will help the reader to focus on content.

Headlines are to inform. They break up the page like a graphic. Headlines are easier to read when placed flush with the left-hand margin of each column. For a sharp headline, capitalize the first letter of each word or just the first word.

All “caps” (capital letters) are difficult to read. Break long headlines into two lines. Italic headlines are used to draw attention to shorter articles.

A table of contents should be used for a lengthy newsletter.

Illustrations, graphics or photos should be used sparingly to draw the reader's attention to an article. Quotes or subtitles that are offset from the text function like graphics, creating a professional editorial look.

Pictures of people should be cropped at the body joints. The head of an individual should be no smaller than a dime. Keep group shots to less than six people.

*Printing a newsletter* (or photocopying) depends on the amount budgeted, the time, equipment and talents available. If the newsletter is to be copied on a machine at the school site, PTA has the responsibility for making arrangements — in advance — with site personnel for the use of copying equipment, which may include purchase of paper and ink or toner and other supplies. Arrange for use of equipment at times convenient for staff.

If printing is done off the school site, obtain bids from at least three print shops before choosing one. To obtain accurate prices, present each with exactly the same information. Anything other than camera-ready copy will cost extra.

### PRINT PREPARATION

Give edited copy to the printer by the expected date.

Ask what the turn-around time is to the finished print job.

Mark copy carefully, so instructions are clear.

Keep a duplicate of all copy submitted.

Prepare a “dummy” showing what the final product should look like, with the size, pages, folds and direction of all printed information as it should appear on the final product.

If the newsletter is mailed, labels and mailing lists should be regularly and carefully checked. Find out if the association can use or purchase school district labels. Discard duplicate labels and mail only one newsletter to each household. Mailing is the best guarantee that the newsletter will reach its readers. Efficient and timely distribution is crucial to the publication process.

### E-NEWSLETTERS

Consider obtaining a PTA unit e-mail address. E-mail mailing lists (a.k.a. listserves) are a cost-effective and efficient way to share information with the membership. A number of online providers allow one to set up a listserv at no charge.

*An e-newsletter* is a timely and cost-effective way to share information with a large number of people. Typically, it is an informational update sent via e-mail to members of an electronic mailing list (Sample e-newsletter Fig. 6-2, 269).

*When sending an e-newsletter, be sure to use a “text-only” format.* HTML-formatted newsletters/e-mails are incompatible with some e-mail systems and may break on arrival and, in some cases, may overload the user's system. In addition, there are some e-mail users who will automatically ignore or delete HTML-formatted messages.

*If the PTA has a website, the e-newsletter is an easy way to promote the site and generate new users.* Keep the e-newsletter brief, provide short summaries of new information available on the site, and include links to the specific pages being discussed. This allows the reader to get a preview and jump to the site easily.

### FLYERS AND BROCHURES

Flyers are a good way to publicize upcoming events, and brochures can tell prospective members about the PTA. When creating either, remember that less is more. Keep the text short and straightforward, and keep the design clean and simple.

Select graphics for both carefully. When designing a print publication, reduce clutter as much as possible. Do not feel that

one must need to fill the page. The most compelling graphic that can be added is “white space.” It adds both interest and readability – and readers will be thankful for it!

If you are using a flyer to publicize an event, be sure to include

- Title;
- Name and address of the location;
- Day, date and time;
- Host, co-sponsors, and important attendees;
- Brief description of the purpose of the event; and
- Phone number or e-mail address to RSVP.

When creating brochures, the most helpful thing to include is a reply card. Reserve a panel of the brochure to allow people to ask for more information or become members easily.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Williams, Robin. *The Non-Designer's Design Book: Design and Typographic Principles for the Visual Novice*. (Berkeley: Peach Pit Press, 1994).

### PUBLICATIONS COORDINATOR

Review [www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org) and [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org).

Subscribe to *PTA in California*, *The Communicator* and *Our Children* (Resources and Subscriptions in the introductory section of the *California State PTA Toolkit*). The cost of PTA subscriptions is a legitimate PTA expense.

Follow council or district PTA guidelines and attend workshops for publications chairmen.

As the new editor of a newsletter, gather all available information from predecessor. Review past issues. Study newsletters and websites from other units. Secure samples from council or district PTA (Online Communications 6.2.5, 268 and Print Communications 6.2.6, 270).

Include the cost of materials — paper, ink, computer software, and postage in the unit budget.

Set newsletter and flyer deadlines, and stick to them. Advise contributors of the due dates frequently. Ask the PTA president to include the items “newsletter and website article assignments” and “publication copy due dates” on all meeting agendas.

Encourage officers and chairmen to share information about their projects, and urge them to contribute short articles and reports for the newsletter. Advise all potential contributors that material will be edited for space and form (grammar, punctuation, spelling and accuracy of information) for the publications.

California State PTA materials may be reprinted: please credit the source. Read National PTA materials carefully to determine when permission to reprint is required. Observe copyright laws by obtaining permission to reprint all non-PTA materials (Sample Request for Use of Copyrighted Material 6.2.2d, 264; Fig 6-1, 265).

Send copies of the newsletter to council and district PTA presidents. The California State PTA newsletter editor would also appreciate receiving a copy. Leave several copies in the school office.

Save a good clear copy of each issue for the publicity record book. Leave two or three copies of each issue in the Publications Coordinator procedure book.

Keep a well-organized procedure book, including the following information, for the next coordinator:

- Number of issues or postings
- Months issued
- Beginning date
- Copy deadline for newsletter, e-newsletter
- Number copies needed
- New newsletter volume number and the date that begins
- Type of duplicating process used
- Materials and printing supplies
- Where purchased
- Amount purchased
- Cost of materials
- Supplies on hand
- Distribution method
- For print medium: U.S. Postal Service regulations and mailing permit information, if mailed
- For electronic medium: Internet service provider, e-mail account names and passwords, Webmaster name and address
- Council and district PTA publication chairman contact information

### 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, 121).

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

### NECESSITIES

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

Helpful tools: fax machine and computer with internet access, publishing software.

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

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