

LAPTA ToolKit

2022 - 2023



Advocacy

2022 – 2023

Section 7

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ABOUT NATIONAL PTA

The Local PTA Unit is a member of the Louisiana PTA (LAPTA) and National PTA organizations, maintains the requirements for active affiliation, and shares the mission, purposes, values, and standards of National PTA. Find more information at LouisianaPTA.org and pta.org.

Why are we here? Mission: To make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Purposes

- To promote the welfare of children in home, school, places of worship, and throughout the community;
- To raise the standards of home life;
- To advocate for laws that further the education, physical and mental health, welfare, and safety of children;
- To promote the collaboration and engagement of families and educators in the education of children;
- To engage the public in united efforts to secure the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being of all children;
- To advocate for fiscal responsibility regarding public tax dollars in public education funding.



Values

- **Collaboration:** We work in partnership with a wide array of individuals and organizations to broaden and enhance our ability to serve and advocate for all children and families.
- **Commitment:** We dedicate ourselves to children's educational success, health, and well-being through strong family and community engagement while remaining accountable to the PTA's founding principles.
- **Diversity:** We acknowledge the potential of everyone without regard to age, culture, economic status, educational background, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, legal status, marital status, mental ability, national origin, organizational position, parental status, physical ability, political philosophy, race, religion, sexual orientation, and work experience.
- **Respect:** We value the individual contributions of members, employees, volunteers, and partners as we work collaboratively to achieve our PTA's goals.
- **Accountability:** All members, employees, volunteers, and partners share responsibility to align their efforts toward the achievement of our PTA's strategic initiatives.

National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships

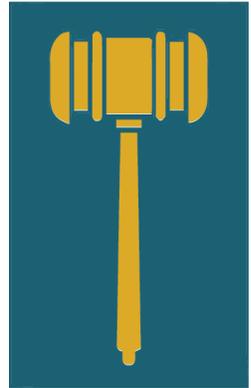
- Standard 1: **Welcoming All Families Into the School Community** – Families actively participate in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.
- Standard 2: **Communicating Effectively** – Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.
- Standard 3: **Supporting Student Success** – Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.
- Standard 4: **Speaking Up for Every Child** – Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, and to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
- Standard 5: **Sharing Power** – Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.
- Standard 6: **Collaborating With Community** – Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS

Successful leaders are effective leaders. Their skills and abilities allow them to step into a variety of roles, and they see the value people have to offer and seek their involvement. They provide a clear purpose that others want to follow. They lead with integrity and strive to continually improve.

The following are competencies effective leaders demonstrate and use to make every child's potential a reality.

- **Self-Awareness** – Has the ability to assess their own strengths and weaknesses
- **Vision** – Demonstrates a clear understanding of the future and how to get there
- **Relationship Building** – Develops trust and mutual respect, and values diversity
- **Critical Thinking** – Obtains all the relevant information, identifies problems and causes, evaluates information, and determines criteria that indicate solutions
- **Time & Resource Management** – Effectively prioritizes and manages resources to accomplish goals
- **Motivation** – Demonstrates and promotes interest and enthusiasm
- **Empathy** – Recognizes verbal and nonverbal feelings, needs, and concerns of others
- **Creativity** – Sees and thinks of innovative ideas, alternatives, and ways to do things
- **Communication** – Listens actively and conveys information clearly, concisely, and accurately in both writing and speech
- **Collaboration** – Works with a team to achieve a common purpose; puts service before self
- **Delegation** – Shares responsibilities including guidance and follow up, fostering leadership in others
- **Continuous Learning** – Pursues development of skills and knowledge
- **Integrity** – Does the right thing when no one is watching
- **Initiative** – Steps up unprompted going above and beyond with excellence



INTRODUCTION TO ADVOCACY

In 1897 when Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst decided that someone should speak out on behalf of children, they founded the National Congress of Mothers which later became PTA. For 125 years, PTA advocacy has resulted in many changes such as creation of kindergarten classes, child labor laws, public health service, juvenile justice system, mandatory immunization, and the school lunch program.

Today, PTA continues to advocate for all children, to press for adequate, equitable, and sustainable school funding, to create safe and healthy communities, and to make every child's potential a reality. Become an advocate by joining Louisiana PTA and National PTA to add your voice to PTA's one voice for every child. Advocacy is what makes PTA different from other parent groups. Each of us desires the best for our children. Reaching out for other children ensures that all children benefit from our efforts. Creating communities that are child friendly places promotes their health and wellbeing where they can prosper.

The *LAPTA Toolkit: Advocacy* will help guide your PTA to advocate at the local, state, and federal level. Here you will find tools to help you tackle an issue, plan out an advocacy campaign, and implement that plan, along with various tips and tools to help along the way.

GATEWAY TO ADVOCACY: WHY ADVOCATE?

Why Advocate? It is probably safe to say that no one first joins PTA to be an advocate. Most initially go to meetings and share their thoughts when the principal asks for ideas on an issue the school is facing. They help run an activity booth at the fall carnival to help raise funds to purchase items that teachers needed in their classrooms. They talk to the child's teacher when another child was bullying them. They work a shift or two at the book fair because the school library would get extra books after the sale. They do these things because they want the child's school to provide the best education possible.

And in doing all these things, they were involved in advocacy, because at the most basic level, advocacy is simply working to make things better. Sometimes that involves speaking to someone with the power to make a change. Sometimes it is raising funds to support that change. By talking to the child's teacher about a problem in the classroom, they already know the basics of advocacy. Talk to the person who can change the situation, share what the problem is, and ask them to fix it (possibly with your solution). The approach is the same when you advocate with a school board member, a state legislator, or a member of Congress.

The *LAPTA Toolkit: Advocacy* is designed to help you and your PTA become more effective advocates, whether that advocacy is in your school, in your district, or at the state or national level. It will help you strategically attack an issue, recruit supporters, build coalitions of like-minded groups, structure your arguments, and communicate effectively. It will help you engage your PTA's members in advocacy and teach you how to take advocacy success from the local level to the state or national level.

PTA was founded on the idea of advocating for children at school, in the home, and in their community. Your PTA has already been involved in advocacy, even if you did not call it that. Now, you can strengthen that advocacy. When we advocate for change, we make things better not just for our child right now, but for every child going forward.

Top 5 ways to help your members advocate for kids

1. Each time a parent attends a conference or communicates with the school, they are advocating for their children. Share PTA's Tips for Parent Teacher Conferences in your newsletter, social media, or website.
2. Help educate voters by hosting a Candidates Forum. This forum can be the vehicle to provide information on where school board candidates stand on issues that affect children. Access National PTA's rules and regulations on political activities to ensure your local unit is following non-partisan IRS regulation for nonprofits.
3. Be part of the solution. Encourage your members to become representatives on school committees and attend school board meetings. Work cooperatively with the school administration to educate the community and address the needs of the children within its confines.
4. Be the information conduit. LAPTA disseminates information on hot issues and pending legislation introduced in Baton Rouge. Set up a system which enables you to share this material in a time sensitive manner with your membership through email blasts and Facebook.
5. A thousand is better than one. Promote membership! Every individual member adds to our strong voice for children. As a group we support issues that promote the well-being of children. The greater our numbers, the greater impact we have speaking on behalf of children. In our highly mobile society, there is no way of knowing where our children will venture. Advocating for all children will make everywhere a better place for them to achieve their dreams.

ADVOCATING AN ISSUE: PLANNING

Planning your approach to your advocacy campaign is like mapping directions to a new vacation destination. You need to figure out what a successful campaign will look like, what steps to take to get there, what resources you have or will need, what obstacles and opposition you might run into along the way, and what other groups might be able to help. These things make up your advocacy campaign strategy, or the map of your advocacy campaign.

One of the best tools to map out your campaign strategy is the Strategy Chart. A strategy is your overall plan, while tactics are the steps you take to achieve that plan’s goals. A strategy chart consists of five columns:

1. **Goals** are what your advocacy campaign will achieve, as well as smaller goals along the way.
2. **Organizational considerations** are the resources your PTA can bring to the campaign including the people who do the work, the time to do each step, the creation of written materials, finances to cover expenses, and what the PTA has to gain from advocating.
3. **Constituents, Allies, and Opponents:** Constituents are the people who will be affected by the change you are advocating for and who might join your advocacy efforts. Allies are those people and organizations outside your PTA who are already involved in advocacy on your issue or who may be persuaded to join your efforts. Opponents are those who will push back against your advocacy efforts.
4. **Targets (decision makers)** are always people and not an institution or elected body. Each person needs a separate strategy chart. Primary targets are those people who can directly give you what your advocacy campaign is asking for. Secondary targets have influence or power over your primary targets.
5. **Tactics** are the actions you are going to take to implement your advocacy strategy to persuade each of your primary targets to take the action you want to implement the changes you desire. Each tactic should be directed at a specific target, backed with a form of power such as “I am a voter in your district,” and make sense to your members. Examples of advocacy tactics are letter/email campaigns, social media campaigns, letters to the editor and op-ed pieces, meetings with decision makers, media events, press releases, public hearings, non-partisan voter registration and education campaigns, and non-partisan candidate forums.

ADVOCACY STRATEGY CHART

GOALS What do you want to achieve?	ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS Resources, skills, gains & needs	CONSTITUENTS, ALLIES & OPPONENTS Who in PTA cares? Outside organizations? Who will fight you?	TARGETS Who can make the change you want? Who can influence them? (Always a person)	TACTICS Applied to your targets to get them to make decisions that will allow you to reach your goal.

SETTING GOALS

A critical step in planning your advocacy campaign is setting goals. These goals should inform all of your work on your advocacy campaign. Ask questions to decide what your goals are:

- What is the desired result of our advocacy?
- Who are the decision makers to make that happen, and what do we want them to do specifically?
- How will we measure our success? What counts as a victory?
- What steps are there on the way to that success that can be identified and celebrated?

Long-term goals should reflect your overall objectives from your advocacy efforts. **Intermediate goals** should reflect victories that indicate you are on the path to achieving your long-term goals. These goals are important to set because they can help to re-energize your advocacy team and bring in new supporters by showing that you are making progress on your long-term goals. **Short-term goals** should be those steps you need to take to reach your intermediate goals and are often very easily achieved goals. They give your advocacy team some quick wins to generate positive momentum toward your long-term goals and encourage others to get involved.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Sometimes your advocacy efforts are focused just on educating your community about an issue. Other times you may need to include an educational component to your advocacy goals because, while you have a specific policy change you want, it is on a topic most people are unaware of. In either instance, your advocacy campaign needs to raise awareness in your community about an issue. Raising public awareness requires a concentrated effort to get your information out in your community in as many ways as possible. Forming coalitions with other organizations that agree with your PTA on the issue can help as well. Here are some ways your PTA can raise public awareness:

- Host a public forum on the issue with local experts, business leaders, local politicians, parents, and students.
- If your school district has a committee focused on the issue, ask that the PTA have a seat on the committee to represent the voice of families in the district.
- Use the public comment period of school board meetings to bring awareness to the issue. Be aware that many school boards limit public comments to two or three minutes, so you may need to spread your information out through several public commenters.
- Provide educational materials as part of voter information. The PTA cannot endorse candidates for any office, but can do non-partisan events like hosting candidate forums, providing voter information on how all the candidates stand on issues, and providing voter scorecards on how incumbents have voted on issues.
- Use public media to build awareness of an issue, including letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, public service announcements (PSAs), local radio call-in shows, TV news public interest pieces, and local community access channels.
- Use social media. Have a memorable hashtag. Develop a selfie-focused campaign with people sharing why they care about the issue (and have them tag their friends).

Candidate or Issue Forum

Candidate or issue forums are a great way to engage your communities in advocacy and to provide information needed to make informed and responsible choices when voting. The following documents are designed to assist your PTA in planning and conducting both types of forums. All sample documents should be edited to fit the needs of your school or district:

CONDUCTING CANDIDATE OR ISSUE FORUMS

PTAs may host candidate and issue forums. The goal of the PTA in conducting nonpartisan candidate forums is to provide information directly from the candidates about their positions on a variety of issues, so that voters can make an informed, responsible choice when voting. In an issue forum, PTAs should remain neutral unless their voting body has given permission to take a specific position. In this way PTA fulfills its goals of being a relevant resource for families and communities and helps individuals become informed advocates for the education and well-being of all children.

What Is a Forum? A forum is a public meeting or assembly for open discussion. At a candidate forum, speakers answer questions directly from audience members, panelists, or a moderator, but do not directly engage with each other. Speakers may be on stage simultaneously or at separate times. If your format requires a moderator, you may consider a person that is not associated with a political interest group to provide a neutral and objective position. Organizations such as The League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, or other community groups familiar with the issues and candidates may be better qualified to ensure the forum is noncommercial, nonsectarian, and nonpartisan. PTA does not participate in candidate nights, forums, or voter awareness programs with organizations that endorse candidates. Forums:

- Inform the public and help voters make informed decisions.
- Provide the public an opportunity to hear the candidates discuss important issues.
- Provide candidates with information that concern their constituents.
- Get candidates on the record so they can be held accountable for their stated positions on issues.
- Provide an opportunity for candidates to get their message out to the voters.
- Provide an important public service.

There are various types of forums that your PTA can hold to address the needs of your PTA and community members. Below are a few of the common types of forums that PTAs conduct:

- **School Board Candidate Forum:** Local school board elections are nonpartisan. Your PTA may hold a forum to provide an opportunity for your community to hear from and ask questions of the candidates. You can prepare questions ahead of time for each candidate to answer, and/or allow questions from the audience. You will want to ensure that all candidates have an opportunity to answer each question (time limit on responses). Treat all candidates the same particularly since many school board members have come from the local PTAs. Remember that PTAs support or oppose issues, not candidates!
- **City Representative Candidate Forum:** PTA may hold a candidate forum to discuss the issues important in that community. Follow the same guidelines offered in the school board candidate forum. When hosting a forum on an issue of concern in your community, it may be more effective if it is a joint venture with your homeowner's association or other neighborhood group. Also, many communities are taking their concerns to and sharing information on community social media channels. Become a part of these networks to engage your PTA community. Remember that PTAs support or oppose issues, not candidates!
- **Ballot Issues Forum:** If your PTA wishes to hold a forum on a ballot issue such as a proposition that affects education, you may consider using the following format. To host a forum for a ballot issue, form a panel of approximately five people who are knowledgeable on the subject, preferably some for and some against it, who can answer questions on the ballot issue. Your PTA may want to consider having one person from your school board, one administrator, one community member, and two others to be identified by your PTA. You might want to consider inviting one of your local state legislators to be on the panel, as well. Your PTA might want to skip the gathering of questions ahead of time and go strictly with questions from the audience. If your PTA uses this approach, it is recommended that you have a couple of PTA volunteers to screen the questions from the audience so that the same question is not asked repeatedly. Screeners can also filter out confusing, poorly worded, and inflammatory questions. Each panelist might be given five minutes or less to introduce themselves and speak on the ballot issue allowing the audience to know who they are ahead of time.

- **Bond Elections Forum:** A school district might want to issue bonds to fund district needs that cannot be met merely by our tax dollars for public schools. The issuance of the bond must be approved on a ballot by the voting public. PTAs can be very helpful by working with the school district to conduct information sessions on the bond issue. Local PTAs take a vote at their local level and take the position of the majority on whether to support the bond election or not. PTAs may publicly demonstrate their support through their usual communication channels, including the posting of yard signs, buttons, t-shirts, etc.
- **Boundary Changes Forum:** PTAs can facilitate a forum to learn about the school boundary proposals. If the PTA is unable to conduct a forum, formulate a questionnaire that can be completed by school district personnel and send to your local newspaper with the school district's responses. Remember to keep it nonpartisan, nonsectarian, and open-minded as this is a way to help the membership become knowledgeable and make informed decisions during election time. Get LAPTA's approval of the questions to be presented.

How to Conduct a Candidate/Issue Forum

1. Review the following Forum Timeline.
2. Form an Interview committee that will:
 - a. Compose and send a questionnaire to each of the candidates.
 - b. Conduct follow-up, in-person, or phone interviews. You must inform the candidate how you will use the information gathered from the questionnaire or interview. If you simply plan to publish the information to members and/or the public, make that clear. The interview questions and format should be the same for each candidate.
 - c. Interviews should be held in a non-threatening environment such as a library, meeting room, or other public building.
 - d. Do not conduct your committee meeting in any place that may imply a position other than noncommercial, nonsectarian, or nonpartisan (for example not a place of worship, elected official's office, etc.).
3. Schedule a candidates' night or public forum alone or with other organizations interested in public education. Remember that a candidate cannot be asked to sign a pledge on any issue. PTA does not participate in candidate nights, forums, or voter awareness programs with organizations that endorse candidates.
4. Have a Get Out the Vote, PTA Votes, or mock student/parent election campaign to encourage voters to head to the polls. You may choose to write postcards or send emails. Provide information on when voting takes place, locations of the polls, and hours of voting. You might also offer transportation options to those needing a ride to the polls. Have the phone number for the county election offices so individuals can call for answers to questions you might not be able to answer. PTA can educate and encourage members to vote. However, you cannot ask members to vote for a particular candidate or party.
5. Announce all forums, candidate nights, etc. in the local papers, by placing flyers in the community, and on local radio or TV stations. Search online for a list of local media. If your local PTA or school district has a website, make sure to publish announcements there and include your website address in all publicity.
6. Notify LAPTA about your forum. We can notify many of our other PTAs of your event details so they may attend, observe, learn, or team up with you.

Questions Format to Guide Your Forum

Your written questionnaire might consist of ten to fifteen questions that the candidate will complete and return to you prior to an interview or forum. Five to eight questions could be selected from the written document for the questions to be asked at the forum. You will also want to consider questions that are relevant and pertinent to your school district. As attendees register for the candidate forum, you may hand them an index card on which they may write the question(s) they wish to ask the candidates. A committee of forum planners should go through the questions to weed out duplicates and inappropriate questions. Use the most relevant questions to form the oral interview questions for the forum.

FORUM TIMELINE

60-90 Days Before Forum

- Identify date for the forum. Factors to be considered could include whether you want to hold the forum just before early voting starts or just before election day. Try to find out if any other organizations are hosting forums.
- Secure a location to hold the forum and reserve the room or building. Ask whether there will be someone there to open and close the facility such as a custodian. Find out who will be setting up the tables, chairs, podium, and microphones.
- Secure a neutral person to be the moderator for the evening. After that person has agreed, make sure they add the forum date to their calendar. Send the moderator a confirmation letter.

45 Days Before Forum

- Solicit questions from PTA members and community members who have an interest in public education.
- Set up a meeting time to finalize which questions will be asked.
- Send an invitation letter to each candidate containing the format for the forum, candidate biographical information, and a place to check yes or no that he/she will be attending the forum.
- Email a letter to the principal or the venue's point person confirming equipment arrangements.

30 Days Before Forum

- Hold a meeting(s) to finalize questions. Designate who will be the two or three timekeepers (one to operate the stopwatch, one to hold the yellow banner, and one to hold the red banner). Designate who will act as host for the evening and introduce the moderator. The moderator can introduce the candidates. Designate who will act as ushers/pages to greet people at the door and hand out the candidate biographical data sheet, as well as to hand out and collect the index cards for the questions from the audience portion of the evening.
- Send out media releases to newspapers and radio and television stations informing them of the date, time, and location of the forum. Ask them to publicize as much as possible. Utilize email and other social media to spread the word about the event.
- Mail out 15 questions to the candidates and perhaps a newspaper reporter that regularly covers your school district.

7 Days Before Forum

- Send reminder email.
- Gather up the following needed items: stopwatch, yellow and red banners, bottles of water for candidates and moderator, index cards and pencils, and name place cards for each candidate and the moderator.

Day of the Forum

- Send reminder email.
- Get room or facility ready, including making sure microphones are working properly.
- Provide bottled waters for candidates.
- Arrive an hour before the forum is scheduled to ensure that the facility and equipment are appropriately placed. Lay out name place cards, bottles of water, index cards, and pencils.

After Forum

- Help clean up the room. Thank the custodian.
- Send thank-you letters to the moderator, the candidates who participated, the principal or venue contact, and the custodian.
- Send a thank-you letter to all volunteers who assisted.

IMPLEMENTATION: DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE

The core of your advocacy campaign is *communication* with your PTA members, potential supporters, and your targets. Each audience needs a message tailored to their situation. Therefore, it is critical to take care in crafting your message.

Creating a Message Box

Once you researched your issue and laid out your campaign strategy, it is time to start crafting your message. A good first step is to create a “message box” that will help you prepare not only for what your PTA needs to say, but also how to respond to what your opposition may say. In creating the message box, you will need to fill in these four quadrants:

What PTA Says About the Issue	What Opposition Says About the Issue
What PTA Says About Opponent’s Position	What Opposition Says About PTA’s Position

Your completed message box helps to frame all messaging during your campaign. A consistent message is essential. Your PTA members are likely to be tired of the message long before it begins to sink in with the decision makers and your community. Also keep in mind that the message box may need to be updated as your opposition crafts different arguments to your message. Your message may need to respond to those updated arguments but keep the consistent focus on your goal.

Creating a Message

In crafting your message, you may find it easiest to start with a long argument supporting your position or a list of talking points and then cutting it down to a focused message, an elevator pitch, and a hashtag. As you create your message, remember the Five Cs of Messaging:

1. **Clear:** Focus your message on two or three simple, easy-to-understand points that address the problem and your solution.
2. **Connect:** Make sure your message connects with your audience and your PTA’s values.
3. **Compelling:** Your message should make your audience care about the issue. Personal stories that illustrate the problem or how your solution has worked elsewhere can help make a compelling message.
4. **Concise:** Your targets are likely busy people, so make sure you put what you are asking them to do right at the beginning of your messages to them before adding supporting information.
5. **Continual:** Keep your message consistent and keep it in front of your audience.

Framing Your Message

Framing your message simply means focusing on the problem in a specific way to highlight the need for change. When you think about framing your message, consider what stories you can tell about the issue you are advocating. What stories highlight the problem? What stories illustrate a way to your solution? What stories will make your targets care about the issue? With PTA advocacy, we often have the advantage of focusing on issues that involve children, and most people inherently want to help children. Think about how you can focus your advocacy message on how the issue affects a single child and how you can tell that child’s story.

Different Types of Messages

Throughout your advocacy campaign, you are likely to need a variety of messages. While the message may be tailored to a specific audience, be sure to keep your advocacy goals front and center in every message. The types of messages you might need include:

- To encourage your PTA members to act
- To raise awareness of and educate people about the issue
- To decision makers to take the action you want
- To encourage counter opposition to your advocacy
- To share your successes along the way towards your long-term goal to encourage more people to join your advocacy

A Resolution is an original main motion which, because of its importance, length, or complexity, is submitted in writing. Resolutions call for action by the LAPTA or its constituent bodies. Resolutions seek to address problems, situations or concerns which affect children and youth, and which require action for solution.

A Legislative Position is a statement outlining the opinion, will, or intent of the PTA to address statewide problems, situations, or concerns that affect children. A position statement usually requires initial action to seek resolution on the issue, but the position is sometimes maintained, even when action has been taken, to substantiate the continuing will of the PTA.

Proposing New Resolutions or Legislative Positions

Local PTAs or LAPTA may submit resolutions or legislative positions. LAPTA considers all submissions, biannually, upon the recommendation of the Advocacy Committee. Submissions must be received at the LAPTA Office no later than November 15th in odd-numbered years.

Criteria for Consideration

- Further the mission of the PTA.
- Align with National PTA and LAPTA policies and are noncommercial, nonpartisan, nonsectarian.
- Concern a matter of national or state scope, not merely local interest.
- Request action that is feasible for LAPTA to undertake.
- Adopted by the membership of the submitting PTA.
- State a position not previously adopted by the LAPTA.

Submission Requirements

- A cover sheet shall be completed and signed by the submitting PTA, include the signatures of the PTA President and Secretary, and indicate the date on which the proposal was adopted by the membership of the submitting PTA.
- The resolution or legislative position language.
- Table of contents for supporting materials.
- A rationale statement (one page or less) summarizing the issue and the need for the requested action.
- Background materials, documenting each “whereas” clause in a resolution or each statement in a legislative position. This material should indicate that the subject was well-researched by the submitting PTA and should be sufficient to give a person with no previous knowledge of the subject enough information to make an intelligent decision. The material must be unbiased, well-balanced, and may include PTA-related information such as statements or policies, copies of document research, pertinent laws, surveys, or statistics, and copies of relevant articles from publications. Newspaper articles and editorials alone are not sufficient background material.

Emergency Resolutions or Legislative Positions

PTAs wishing to propose an emergency item must submit the proposal to the LAPTA no later June 15 in even-numbered years. To be eligible for emergency consideration, the issue must have arisen after the published November 15 submission deadline. If approved by the LAPTA Board of Directors, a two-thirds affirmative vote of the delegate body is necessary to consider the emergency item.

USING THE MEDIA

Whether you are campaigning to raise awareness of an issue, educate your community about an issue, or advocate for change, media provides the best opportunity to get your message in front of the most people. Consequently, you will want to include a media plan in your advocacy campaign.

Using Different Types of Media

Each media platform has its advantages and disadvantages. You will want to spread your media efforts across as many platforms as possible, since they often reach different audiences.

- **Newspapers:** Local newspapers are a great way to get your message in front of your community. Daily papers can be useful through letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, articles by reporters, and meetings with the editorial board. Weekly papers are often locally focused and may even run a press release word for word.
- **Radio:** There are very few locally focused radio news stations, but some local stations may have call-in talk shows that can be a good way to get your issue out to the public.
- **Television:** TV news tend to focus more on visual-oriented stories, so think of ways to present your issue visually if you are looking for TV coverage. Some options might be a walkthrough of a school to illustrate needs. Keep in mind that while a TV reporter may interview you for five or ten minutes for a story, they are likely to only use 30 seconds of it in the story, so make sure you are bringing every question around to your key points.
- **Social Media:** Social media can be a blessing and a curse. It provides an opportunity to reach a broad audience, engage people in your advocacy, and energize younger groups that might not see any other media. However, it is also possible to have a strong backlash on social media, often from people not in your community, if someone with a large following shares your post. Going viral can cut both ways. Make sure your social media messages have a consistent and easy-to-use hashtag and a consistent graphic identity. Be prepared to engage with some replies to your posts but remember not to feed the trolls. The mute and block tools are there for a reason, and do not be afraid to use them.

Activities that Generate Media Interest

Media coverage can be a long-term effort. Learn who covers education issues at the local paper, radio station, or TV station. Follow them on social media and see what type of stories they are covering. That tells you not only what they are reporting on but also what types of stories their editors are printing or airing. When pitching stories, be sure to emphasize the local angle and the importance of the issue to your community. Think about the potential visual aspects of the story, as even getting just a picture and caption in the newspaper can help with your advocacy campaign. Inform the media of the event several days in advance through a press release. Here are some activities that may generate media interest:

- School board or other candidate forums
- PTA events that involve kids doing something related to your campaign
- Press conference (if you have actual news), ideally in front of an example of what you are advocating about. The best time for press conferences is Tuesday through Thursday between 10 am and 2 pm, which allows reporters to get their story ready for evening news programs.
- Picketing with educational handouts

HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

Use a press release if you are contacting multiple media outlets. There is a specific format for a press release, and you can use numerous online examples for formatting guidance. You can also look at National PTA's online press releases, which are good examples of content, but not necessarily laid out like a traditional press release. At the top left of the page, put the name and contact information for the person reporters should reach out to for further information. At the top right of the page, put "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" (typically in all caps and bold). Below the contact information, place a headline that quickly summarizes what the press release is about, centered on the page in bold. Make sure your headline stands out by using action verbs, specific, and keeping it short. If you need to, you can add a subheading in italics below the headline. Keep in mind that newsrooms get dozens or hundreds of press releases every day, so make sure your headline is compelling.

Because newsrooms get so many press releases, you need to make sure the most important information is right at the top. The first paragraph should cover who, what, and where. The second paragraph should cover the why. These two paragraphs should cover all crucial information. Beyond the first two paragraphs, you can add a quote from your PTA president or a PTA family, share non-critical information, and provide a summary of what your PTA is. Try to keep your press release to a single page. At the end of your press release, centered on the page, put "###" or "-30-" to signify the end of the release.

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER TO A LEGISLATOR

Be sure to thank your legislator (or any other decision maker) after meeting with them. This is an opportunity to reinforce your advocacy message, provide additional information, and answer any questions you could not answer during your meeting. Your thank you can be by email, but never underestimate the power of a handwritten note. If you met with a staff person rather than your legislator, be sure to mention them by name in the thank you. If the staff person was helpful, courteous, informative, etc., mention that as well, as your legislator is likely to mention it to the staffer. A good relationship with a legislator's staff is as important as a good relationship with your legislator, because staff are likely to be the ones setting up meetings, reading emails, and putting your call through to the legislator. Replace the bracketed text below with the proper items.

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Last Name],

Thank you for taking the time to meet with [me/us] on [date] regarding [issue]. As requested, here is the additional information I mentioned in our meeting. I hope we can count on your support for [issue], and I look forward to speaking with you again in the future.

Sincerely,
Signature
[PTA Name, Position]

ADVOCATING WITH YOUR SCHOOL BOARD

Just starting on your advocacy journey? It is common to feel nervous as you start this process, and your local school board is a common place to start. Local PTAs want school board members to know their PTA leaders and members as a useful and knowledgeable resource when it comes to matters that concern students and their schools. Developing this relationship is done in a variety of ways, not the least of which is a regular attendance at school board meetings and developing an understanding of the role of an elected school board member. Virtual school board meetings make it easier to become familiar with how your school board works and to stay aware of the issues they are dealing with. When you need to advocate with your school board, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Public comments might only be allowed during a public comment period at the beginning of the meeting, not while an agenda item is being discussed. Be aware of how your school board handles public comments.
- Public comments are limited by time, so know how long your school board allows. Two or three minutes is common.
- Board members listen, but generally do not respond to public comments when they are made. They may ask a question to clarify the comment.
- If you are meeting with school board members to discuss your issue, it is probably best to do it one on one.

Using the School Board Public Comment Period Effectively

Because public comment time is limited to a couple of minutes, it is important to use this time wisely. If you have several points to make, it may be helpful to divide those points between different speakers. In those cases, you will still want to limit the number of speakers in the interest of time and make sure none of your comments overlap with what others are saying. Here are some other tips on commenting at school board meetings:

- **Prepare/Research:** Review your Local PTA Unit meeting minutes and your school board meeting minutes and website for information pertinent to your planned comments. Check the source of information that you have with information from your school district. School board policy requires transparency of information and reports and is an excellent resource for financial, academic, operations, human resources, communications, and school board information. Check your district’s public participation policy to know which part of the meeting agenda the public may speak during. It may be once or twice during the meeting and may have an “agenda item-only requirement” for one of the two public comment options.
- **Organize your thoughts:** Outline your key points and start by explaining to the board members what you are there to speak about. Knowing exactly what you are there to praise/thank, ask for clarification, or share your disagreement about allows your listeners to focus on your entire message. Be honest about your level of comfort speaking publicly. Unless you are completely comfortable speaking “off the cuff” you should write your statement out and read it directly during the comment time. Having it printed out to make any last-minute changes is easiest to do. If you use a tablet, iPad, or smartphone be sure to have it easily accessible. It is easy to lose your place when scrolling through the document so consider saving it as a PDF on your phone or tablet. Use a large font to make it easier to read.
- **Practice:** Be sure to say your name to introduce yourself and the school with which you are associated. Read your public comment aloud to hear it for yourself and to practice speaking slowly and emphasizing aspects of your message to match what you want them to truly hear. Do not raise your voice, use sarcasm, be dismissive of their role, denigrate members of the administration, or speak negatively about your school’s principal, administrators, faculty, or staff. If you have a problem related to a staff member, that issue should be raised in private with the principal of the school, with the assistant superintendent for that area, or the superintendent once all avenues have been tried. Watch your time, and if you have only one or two sentences remaining, let the board president know to allow you to finish.



APPLICATION FOR STUDENT ADVOCACY AWARD

Application Deadline: February 1, 2023
Apply at: <https://form.jotform.com/221794914529163>

Winners Announced: March 25, 2023
Quantity Offered: 2

LAPTA accepts applications for our Student Advocacy Award program to recognize students who help to truly enhance public education. Students who are involved with civic engagement at an early age are the pillars of Louisiana’s future! Students can apply for the Outstanding Advocates for Children (OAC) or Be the Voice (BTV) advocacy awards. Submit materials and documentation substantiating the completed advocacy work online. **Application deadline is February 1, 2023.** Winners will be announced March 25, 2023.

Student Name

Local PTA at the Student’s School

School Name

Parish

Parent Name

Parent Email

Award eligibility for students for Outstanding Advocates for Children (OAC) must have completed at least two *Civic Engagement Activities*. Eligibility for Be the Voice (BTV) must have completed at least one *Civic Engagement Activities*.

Application for: Outstanding Advocates for Children (OAC) Be the Voice (BTV)

Complete the following steps.

1. Select the completed **Civic Engagement Activities**. **Attach documentation for each item.**
 - Sponsored voter registration drive.
 - Hosted voter education program.
 - Hosted a program or campaign about a LAPTA legislative priority issue.
 - Met with legislators representing student’s school community.
 - Created an online candidate questionnaire regarding PTA legislative priorities.
 - Other community engagement.

2. Attach further information or documentation that strengthens the application.



Submit application online at <https://form.jotform.com/221794914529163> or scan the QR Code by February 1, 2023. Winners will be announced on March 25, 2023.