

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.