

2024–25 PTA Leader



Section 7: Advocacy

LouisianaPTA.org/advocate



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VOLUNTEER FOR ADVENTURE

The 2024-25 theme for Louisiana PTA is “Join the PTA Adventure” which points to the fun side and the direction of your PTA’s work and emphasizes joining as a member. How can you keep PTA fun for yourself and others? What direction is your PTA headed? Have you planned for the PTA’s future? What does your PTA adventure look like? The philanthropic work of PTA is a huge personal opportunity to give to others and to positively impact the lives of children to help them reach their potential!

The Louisiana PTA Board is planning its future, and we see YOU in it. There are Board positions that don’t take much time or that can use your gifts and talents to the fullest. If you’d like to increase your impact on children through PTA work at the state level, please contact LAPTA. We all do it because it’s enjoyable, and you are part of our future plan! Email President@LouisianaPTA.org to talk about how you might fit in.

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 more than 125 years, PTA advocacy led to many changes, such as the 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 with the Local PTA Unit or 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 to other children ensures that all children benefit from our efforts. Creating communities that are child friendly places promotes the health and wellbeing of all children where they can prosper.

The *LAPTA Toolkit: Advocacy* will help guide the PTA to become an advocate. It includes tools to tackle an issue, plan out and implement an advocacy campaign, and various tips and tools to help along the way.

Always notify LAPTA of any advocacy plans and actions because it needs to align with any stances that National PTA has implemented. LAPTA would also like to support the advocacy of Local PTA Units and help them reach their goals. LAPTA is your ally!

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 classroom supplies for teachers. They talk to the child's teacher when another child is 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 while possibly offering a solution. The approach is the same when advocating with a school board member, a state legislator, or a member of Congress.

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

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

Top 5 Ways to Help Members Advocate for Children

1. Each time a parent attends a conference or communicates with the school, they are advocating for their child. Share [*Speaking Up for Every Child: Tips from a Parent Advocate*](#) in the PTA newsletter, social media, or website.
2. Help educate voters by hosting a Candidate 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 following non-partisan IRS regulation for nonprofits. *Planning details to host a forum follow.*
3. Be part of the solution. Encourage 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. Share this material in a time sensitive manner with members.
5. A thousand is better than one. Promote membership! Every member adds to the strength of the PTA's voice as it supports issues that promote the well-being of children. The greater the numbers, the greater impact it can have. Advocating for all children helps them to achieve their dreams.

The logo for Louisiana PTA is a dark blue rectangle. Inside, the words "LOUISIANA PTA" are written in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, the phrase "Established 1923" is written in a white, cursive script font.

LOUISIANA PTA
Established 1923

ADVOCATING AN ISSUE: PLANNING

Planning the approach to an advocacy campaign is like mapping directions to a new vacation destination. Create an advocacy campaign strategy by figuring out what a successful campaign looks like, what steps to take to get there, what resources are needed, what obstacles and opposition might occur, and what other groups can assist.

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

1. **Goals** are what the advocacy campaign will ultimately achieve, as well as smaller goals along the way.
2. **Organizational considerations** are the resources the PTA can bring to the campaign including volunteers, the creation of written materials, finances, 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 being advocated for and who might join the advocacy efforts. Allies are those people and organizations outside the PTA who are already involved in advocacy on the issue or who may be persuaded to join the efforts. Opponents are those who will push back against the 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 what the advocacy campaign is asking for. Secondary targets have influence or power over the primary targets.
5. **Tactics** are the actions taken to implement the advocacy strategy to persuade each of the primary targets to take the desired action. 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 the members. Examples of advocacy tactics are letter or 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, non-partisan 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 desired change? Who can influence them? (Always a person)	TACTICS Applied to the targets to get them to make supportive decisions to reach the goal.

SETTING GOALS

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

- What is the desired result of the advocacy?
- Who are the decision makers to make that happen, and what do they need to do specifically?
- How will successes be measured? What counts as a victory?
- What steps along the way to the goal can be identified and celebrated?

Long-term goals should reflect the overall objectives from the advocacy efforts. **Intermediate goals** should reflect victories that are along the way to achieving the long-term goals. These goals are important to set. They help to re-energize the advocacy team and they can bring in new supporters who see early progress as a success. **Short-term goals** are the steps needed to reach the intermediate goals and are often easily achieved. They generate positive momentum to reach long-term goals and encourage others to get involved.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Sometimes advocacy efforts are focused just on educating the community about an unknown issue. A campaign can raise awareness in the community about an issue. Raising public awareness requires a concentrated effort to educate the community in as many ways as possible. Form coalitions with other organizations that agree with the PTA on the issue. Here are some ways a PTA can raise public awareness:

- Host a public forum on the issue with local experts, business leaders, local politicians, parents, and students.
- If the school district has a committee focused on the issue, ask for the PTA to 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.
- Provide educational materials as part of voter information. The PTA 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 previously voted.
- Use public media to build awareness on an issue, including letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, public service announcements, 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.

CONDUCTING CANDIDATE OR ISSUE FORUMS

Candidate or issue forums are a great way to engage communities in advocacy and to provide information needed to make informed and responsible choices when voting. The goal 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 the PTA is 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 the format requires a moderator, consider a neutral person who is not associated with a political interest group. 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. The purpose of forums is to inform the public and help voters make informed decisions, allow the public to hear the candidates discuss important issues, provide candidates with information that concerns their constituents, get candidates on the record so they can be held accountable for their stated positions on issues, allow the candidates to get their message out to the voters, and provide an important public service. Remember that PTAs support or oppose issues, not candidates!

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

- **School Board Candidate Forum:** PTA can hold a forum to allow the community to hear from and ask questions of the candidates. Prepare questions ahead of time for each candidate to answer and possibly allow questions from the audience. All candidates must have equal opportunity to answer each question with a limited response time. Treat all candidates the same, particularly since many school board members have come from local PTAs.
- **Local Representative Candidate Forum:** The PTA may hold a candidate forum to discuss the issues important in the community. It might be more effective to do a joint venture with another association or group. Become a part of the community's social media groups where concerns are voiced and information shared to engage the PTA community.
- **Ballot Issues Forum:** 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. The PTA may want to consider having one person from the school board, one administrator, one community member, and two others. Consider inviting a local state legislator to be on the panel, as well. The

PTA might want to skip the gathering of questions ahead of time and go strictly with questions from the audience. If the PTA uses this approach, have a couple of PTA volunteers to screen the questions from the audience so that the same question is not asked repeatedly. Give each panelist five minutes or less to introduce themselves and to speak on the ballot issue which allows the audience to know who they are.

- **Bond Elections Forum:** A school district might want to issue bonds to fund district needs that cannot be met merely by the 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 need to 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 proposed school boundary changes. If the PTA is unable to conduct a forum, formulate a questionnaire that can be completed by school district personnel and send it to the 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.

How to Conduct a Candidate/Issue Forum

1. Notify LAPTA about the forum. LAPTA will notify other PTAs of the event who might attend, observe, learn, or team up with the PTA.
2. Form an Interview Committee that will compose and send a questionnaire to each of the candidates. They will conduct follow-up, in-person, or phone interviews and inform the candidate on how the information gathered from the questionnaire or interview will be shared. The questions and format should be the same for each candidate. Interviews should be held in a non-threatening environment such as a library, meeting room, or other public building. Do not conduct committee meetings in any place that may imply a position other than noncommercial, nonsectarian, or nonpartisan. For example, do not use a place of worship or elected official's office.
3. Schedule a candidates' night or public forum alone or with other organizations interested in public education who do not endorse candidates. A candidate cannot be asked to sign a pledge on any issue.
4. Have a Get Out the Vote, PTA Votes, or mock student-parent election campaign to encourage voters to head to the polls. Consider using postcards or emails. Provide information on voting dates, locations of the polls, hours of voting, and the parish election office phone number. A PTA could offer transportation options to those needing a ride to the polls. PTA can educate and encourage members to vote. However, they cannot ask members to vote for a particular candidate or party.
5. Announce all forums, candidate nights, and events in the local papers by placing flyers around the community and on local radio or TV stations. Search online for a list of local media. If the PTA or school district has a website, make sure to publish announcements there and include that website address on all publicity.

Questionnaire Format for the Forum

The written questionnaire might consist of 10 to 15 questions for the candidate to complete and return prior to the interview or forum. Five to eight questions could be selected to be asked at the forum. Consider questions that are relevant and pertinent to the school district. As attendees register for the candidate forum, give them an index card on which they may write the questions they wish to ask. A committee of forum planners should 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

- Set a date for the forum. Considered if the forum will be just before early voting or just before election day. 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 and who will set up the tables, chairs, podium, and microphones.
- Get a neutral person to be the moderator for the evening. 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 of the forum, candidate biographical information, and confirmation that they will attend the forum.
- Email a letter to the principal or the venue's point person confirming equipment arrangements.

30 Days Before Forum

- Hold a meeting to finalize the details. Select the questions. Designate 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 host the evening and introduce the moderator. The moderator can introduce the candidates. Designate ushers to greet people at the door, to hand out the candidate biographical data sheet, and to hand out and collect index cards for the audience's questions.
- 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.
- Send the 15 questions to the candidates and perhaps a newspaper reporter that covers the school district.

7 Days Before Forum

- Send reminder emails.
- Organize the candidates' answers to the questions in an easy to read chart form.
- Gather up a stopwatch, yellow and red banners, bottles of water for candidates and the moderator, index cards and pencils, and name place cards for each candidate and the moderator.

Day of the Forum

- Send reminder emails. Confirm that everyone is attending.
- Get the room or facility ready, including making sure microphones are working properly.
- Arrive an hour before the forum start time 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.
- Send thank you letters to the moderator, the participating candidates, the principal or venue contact, the custodian, and all volunteers.

IMPLEMENTATION: DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE

The core of the advocacy campaign is *communication* with the PTA members, potential supporters, and the targets. Each audience needs a message tailored to their situation. It is critical to effectively craft the message.

Creating a Message Box

Once the issue is researched and the campaign strategy completed, it is time to carefully craft the message. Create a “message box” that will help prepare what the PTA needs to say and how to respond to any opposition. In creating the message box, 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

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

Creating a Message

In crafting a message, start with a long argument supporting the position or a list of talking points. Then cut it down to a focused message, to an elevator pitch, and to a hashtag. Refer to the “Five Cs of Messaging”:

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

Framing the Message

Framing the message simply means focusing on the problem in a specific way to highlight the need for change. Consider what stories can be told about the issue and its importance. What stories highlight the problem? What stories illustrate a way to the solution? What stories will make the targets care about the issue? Most people inherently want to help children. Focus the advocacy message on how it affects a single child and how to tell that child’s story.

Different Types of Messages

Throughout the advocacy campaign, a variety of messages will be needed. While the message may be tailored to a specific audience, keep the advocacy goals front and center in every message. Different messages might encourage the PTA members to act, raise awareness of and educate people about the issue, tell decision makers which action to take, encourage counter opposition to the advocacy, and share the successes along the way to encourage more people to join in the PTA’s efforts.



RESOLUTIONS AND LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS

A Resolution is an original main motion which is submitted in writing because of its importance, length, or complexity. Resolutions call for action by its constituent bodies. They seek to address problems, situations, or concerns that affect children and they require action for a 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. Sometimes the position is maintained to substantiate the continuing will of the PTA.

Local PTAs can propose new resolutions or legislative positions to LAPTA. LAPTA considers all submissions upon the recommendation of the LAPTA Resolutions and Directives Committee. Submissions must be received at least 60 days before the annual LAPTA General Membership Meeting and need approval by LAPTA BOD to continue. Emergency resolutions may be submitted only if the urgency of the subject matter arose after the deadline. LAPTA reserves the right to edit the resolution, except for intent. The submitting group provides copies to the General Membership. An affirmative two-thirds vote is required for adoption. The resolution must further the PTA mission, align with National PTA and LAPTA policies, be a matter of national or state scope, be a feasible action for LAPTA to undertake, and have the support of the submitting PTA.

To submit a resolution to LAPTA, use a cover sheet signed by the submitting PTA's President and Secretary. Indicate the date on which the proposal was adopted by the membership of the submitting PTA, state the resolution or legislative position language, include a table of contents for supporting materials, and have a rationale statement (one page or less) summarizing the issue and the need for the requested action. Use background materials to document 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, statistics, or relevant articles from publications. Newspaper articles and editorials alone are not sufficient background material.

USING THE MEDIA

The media provides the best opportunity to get the message in front of the most people when campaigning to raise awareness of an issue, educate about an issue, or advocate for change. Consequently, include a media plan in the advocacy campaign. Each media platform has its advantages and disadvantages. Spread media efforts across as many platforms as possible since they often reach different audiences.

- **Newspapers:** Local newspapers are a great way to get the message in front of the 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 might 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 an issue out to the public.
- **Television:** TV news tends to focus more on visual-oriented stories, so think of ways to present the issue visually for TV coverage. Some options might be a walkthrough of a school to illustrate needs. Keep in mind that while a TV reporter may do a 10 minute interview for a story, they are likely to only use 30 seconds of it in the story. Make sure to bring every question around to the 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 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 the community and especially if someone with a large following shares a post. Going viral can cut both ways. Make sure the social media messages have a consistent and easy-to-use hashtag and a consistent graphic identity. Be prepared to engage with some replies to posts but remember not to feed the trolls. The mute and block tools are there for a reason. 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 to see what types of stories they cover and what their editors are printing or airing. When pitching stories, be sure to emphasize the local angle and the importance of the issue to the community. Think about the potential visual aspects of the story. Getting just a picture and caption in the newspaper can help with the advocacy campaign. Inform the media of any events several days in advance through a press release. Some activities that generate media interest are school board or other candidate forums, PTA events that involve kids doing something related to the campaign, picketing with educational handouts, and press conferences ideally about the advocating issue. 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.

HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

Use a press release to contact multiple media outlets. There is a specific format for a press release with numerous examples online for formatting guidance. Refer to National PTA's online press releases which are good examples of content. 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, put a headline that quickly summarizes what the press release is about, centered on the page, and in bold. Make sure the headline stands out by using action verbs, be specific, and keep it short. If needed, use a subheading in italics below the headline.

Keep in mind that newsrooms get dozens or hundreds of press releases every day, so make sure the headline is compelling. 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, add a quote from the PTA president or a PTA family and provide a summary of what the PTA is and non-critical information. Try to keep the press release to a single page. At the end of the 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 every legislator or any other decision maker after meeting with them. This is an opportunity to reinforce the advocacy message, provide additional information, and answer any questions not answered during the meeting. It can be an email but never underestimate the power of a handwritten note. If the meeting was with a staff person rather than the 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 because the 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 the legislator, especially since the staff are likely to be the ones setting up meetings, reading emails, and putting calls through. Replace the bracketed text below to customize the note.

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Last Name],

Thank you for taking the time to meet with [me/us] from [PTA name] on [date] regarding [issue]. As requested, here is the additional information I mentioned in our meeting. [Answers to questions or further information.] 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

When starting an advocacy journey, it is common to feel nervous. The 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, such as regular attendance at school board meetings and understanding the role of an elected school board member. Virtual school board meetings make it easier to become familiar with how the school board works and to stay aware of the current issues. When advocating with the school board, remember that public comments might only be allowed during a public comment period. Be aware of how the school board handles public comments and how much time is allotted. Board Members listen, but generally do not respond to public comments when they are made although they might ask a question to clarify a comment. To discuss an issue with school board members, it is 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 several points need to be made, it may be helpful to divide those points between different speakers. In those cases, limit the number of speakers in the interest of time and make sure none of the comments overlaps with what others are saying. Here are some other tips on commenting at school board meetings:

- **Prepare and Research:** Review the PTA meeting minutes, the school board meeting minutes, and its website for information pertinent to the planned comments. Check the PTA's source of information with the school district's source of information. School board policy requires transparency of information and is an excellent resource for financial, academic, human resources, communications, and school board information. Check the district's public participation policy to know when the public may speak during a meeting. It might be once or twice during the meeting and might have an "agenda item-only requirement" for one of the two public comment options.
- **Organize thoughts:** Outline the key points and start by explaining to the board members what the issue or concern is. Allow listeners to focus on the message by knowing ahead of time exactly what will be thanked, what needs clarification, or how the PTA disagrees. Use a person who is comfortable speaking publicly. Write the statement down and then read it directly during the comment time. Having it printed out in a way that makes last-minute changes easy to do. If using a tablet, iPad, or smartphone, be sure it is easily accessible and charged. It is easy to lose one's place when scrolling through a document, so consider saving it as a PDF or screenshot and use a large font to make it easy to read.
- **Practice:** The speaker should state their name and the associated school. They should read the public comment out loud and practice speaking slowly with emphasis on important aspects of the message. They should not raise their voice, use sarcasm, be dismissive toward others, denigrate board members, or speak negatively about the school's principal, administrators, faculty, or staff. Watch the time. If one or two sentences remain when time is up, ask the board president for another minute to finish.

LAPTA ADVOCACY AWARD FOR A PTA

Application Deadline: March 31, 2025

Winners Announced: April 14, 2025

Apply at LouisianaPTA.org/awards

Quantity Offered: 2

The LAPTA Advocacy Award is available for up to two Local PTA Units. The purpose of the Advocacy Award is to recognize a PTA Unit who has worked to make a change for the betterment of children. Advocacy is the heart of PTA and should be the priority of all. Every PTA should have a year's worth of advocacy that they could submit!

There are a multitude of ways PTAs or students can advocate to make all children's potential a reality. See the LAPTA Toolkit Section 7: Advocacy for insights and suggestions.

Entry information includes Local PTA Name, LUR#, parish, PTA contact, PTA position, PTA budget totals, and documentation of the advocacy work. Describe the advocacy work. Who was involved? What was the initial plan? Did the plan change over time and how? Was the work publicized and to whom? What impact did the advocacy work have on children or who was the beneficiary of the work? Be as thorough and descriptive of the advocacy work as possible, which can be more than one project, event, or item. The format can be PDF, Word file, pictures in any format, etc. All applications will be reviewed blindly by the LAPTA Board of Directors.

Submit application by March 31, 2025, at LouisianaPTA.org/awards.

LAPTA ADVOCACY AWARD FOR A STUDENT

Application Deadline: March 31, 2025

Winners Announced: April 14, 2025

Apply at LouisianaPTA.org/awards

Quantity Offered: 2

The LAPTA Advocacy Award is available for up to two Louisiana students who are in high school or younger. The purpose of the Advocacy Award is to recognize a student who worked to make a change for the betterment of children. Advocacy is the heart of PTA and should be the priority of all. It's never too soon for students to get involved in advocacy work!

There are a multitude of ways students can advocate to help achieve PTA's mission which is to make all children's potential a reality. See the LAPTA Toolkit Section 7: Advocacy for insights and suggestions.

Entry information includes the student's contact information and school, parental consent, the PTA name that they are a member of, PTA's parish, detailed and complete documentation of the advocacy work, and two letters of recommendation. Describe the advocacy work. Who was involved? What was the initial plan? Did the plan change over time and how? Was the work publicized and to whom? What impact did the advocacy work have on children or who was the beneficiary of the work? Be as thorough and descriptive of the advocacy work as possible, which can be more than one project, event, or item. The format can be PDF, Word file, pictures in any format, etc. All applications will be reviewed blindly by the LAPTA Board of Directors.

Submit application by March 31, 2025, at LouisianaPTA.org/awards.