

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

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

PUBLICIZE PTA TO THE COMMUNITY

PTA enjoys excellent name recognition. It is important to remember that although this recognition exists, many may not be familiar with the actual functions of PTA.

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

Contact newspapers and radio and television stations to stimulate the media’s interest in covering PTA events and programs, and legislative issues.

Do not forget community websites, social media (Facebook), blogs and online bulletin boards now available. Any coverage will benefit membership by increasing community awareness of PTA’s projects.

PTA TALKING POINTS

When speaking about PTA, there is little time to make a point heard. These talking points and facts will help demonstrate the PTA’s strength.

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

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

The PTA represents every child in California. PTA’s tagline is “everychild. onevoice.” All members work toward that goal.

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

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

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

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

CREATE A PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

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

Step One

Incorporate the statewide motto – “everychild. onevoice.” – and PTA logo into the public relations campaign. This shows a unity of effort and purpose, as well as demonstrate participation in a national association.

Refer to the *California State PTA Toolkit*, PTA Style Guide (Forms) for correct PTA terminology and formatting.

Step Two

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

Step Three

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

Step Four

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

Step Five

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

PLANNING FOR COMMUNICATIONS

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

Choose the Medium. Once the audience is identified, plan accordingly. Think about the best way to reach the audience. Determine the ideal method of communication. There is no universal choice. Depending on the audience and the message, the method could be anything from creating a website, using e-mail or social media, or making a phone call.

Prepare the Message. Think through what needs to be said and how to say it. Take the time to review and refine the PTA Talking Points (6.1.1) to concisely convey the message. Link the PTA talking points to the ones created for your association.

Consider what the media or audience needs to understand, after you finish communicating. All energy should be focused on making that message clear – discard all the rest.

GUIDELINES FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS

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

All material must be cleared with the PTA president and school principal before printing.

The principal is responsible for the accuracy of school information, 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 expose the PTA to a libel or slander suit.

TRANSLATING MATERIALS

PTAs must work closely with the school to meet the language needs of all who receive information. Some schools and school districts are required to translate all material if foreign language speakers make up 15 percent or more of the student population.

MEDIA OUTREACH

The first step to effectively reaching the media is to create a list of media outlets and key reporters who may be interested in PTA's efforts. To create this list watch the news, check the Internet, contact the media outlets or read the newspaper.

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

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

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

PTA has interviews about issues and interviews about positive activities. Preparing for them is similar. Before speaking to the media, make sure you understand what facts can concisely convey the answers to the following questions:

What is the problem?

What is the solution?

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

What does PTA want the media to report?

Who supports PTA's efforts? Why?

Who opposes PTA's efforts? Why?

What are the key points to address the opposition's concerns?

FOR POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

What is the event or program?

What are the facts?

How does it relate to what PTA believes?

How will it benefit children?

What is the message point?

Why is PTA organizing or participating in the event?

MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

Plan talking points, and make them early and often. Remember, an interview is an opportunity to tell PTA's story and to make PTA's case. Prepare the points you want, and use every question as an opportunity to repeat them (Talking Points 6.1.1).

You are the authority. You were approached because you are a leader representing PTA. If the reporter asks questions you are not prepared to answer because they are outside your area of expertise, say, "I don't know, but I will get back to you in time for your deadline." Then consult with officers/chairmen who have the needed expertise.

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

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

Tell the truth. Factual information is a must. If a statement is made that is not true, refute it immediately and politely. You can use the ABC approach: A) Acknowledge that "some might believe that, B) but PTA is the expert, and, C) the truth is" Always correct the information in an informative and helpful manner.

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

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

SPEAKING IN SOUND BITES

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

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

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

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

Evoked pictures. If the speaker can make people see what is being discussed, the point will be more memorable and have more impact.

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

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

COMMENTS ON INTERNET SITES, RESPONSES TO BLOGS, AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The media and bloggers put their stories online and allow comments. Monitor media and bloggers' websites and comment when appropriate. An important place to be heard is the newspaper's letters to the editor section. Through an Internet comment or letter to the editor submission, reinforce the PTA message and concisely state the PTA position. Direct members to Internet discussions and comments, and distribute PTA material to help others get a clear idea of the position. Maintain PTA's high standards of respectful dialogue and repeat PTA positions accurately.

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

Explain why you are writing. If responding directly to a media report, state the story's headline and publication date.

Focus the message. Limit the content to the key point you want readers to remember.

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

OPINION EDITORIALS

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

PLANNING THE OP-ED

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

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

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

What is the specific policy solution one wants to advocate?

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

What compelling facts or statistics help to make the case?

What metaphors or images might help to reinforce the point?

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

CREATING NEWS

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

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

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

MEDIA ADVISORIES

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

MEDIA RELEASES

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

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

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

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

A media advisory should be e-mailed or faxed a couple of weeks before the event, with follow-up e-mails and calls the day before the event. However, discuss the advance lead time required with local media; smaller outlets may require a longer lead time. Include a hard copy of the media release in the press kit on the day of the event (Sample Media Release Fig. 6-3).

Each paragraph should not exceed four to five lines. Double-space the text.

The whole release should not exceed one and a half pages. Do not split paragraphs between pages.

Use the traditional format illustrated in *Toolkit* (Fig. 6-3). Every release should carry a name as the contact for further information, a telephone number, e-mail address, the date and, of course, the name of the PTA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

RESOURCES

Review www.capta.org and www.pta.org and subscribe to California State PTA's and National PTA's numerous electronic subscriptions.

Subscribe to print versions of *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.

California State PTA Toolkit, National PTA publications and guides, grammar book, dictionary, thesaurus. Follow council or district PTA guidelines and attend workshops for – and network with – public relations chairmen.

As a the new chairman, gather all available information from predecessor. Review previous media plans. Keep a well-organized procedure book, including the following information, for the next chairman.

NECESSARY INFORMATION

PTA's history; Purposes of the PTA, Mission Statement of the California State PTA; California State PTA Core Values; California State PTA Legislation Platform; Basic Statements About Current Issues, and the PTA's basic policies, procedures, and programs (*Toolkit* Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 6).

PTA Style Guide, *Toolkit*, Forms, Chapter 9.

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

RESOURCES

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

HELPFUL TOOLS

Computer with Internet access.

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