

The PTA Difference

Given the longevity and universal name recognition of our organization, it's easy to understand how "PTA" is commonly used to describe all parent groups, whether or not they are actually affiliated with PTA. Parents, teachers, and even administrators are frequently confused or even unaware of the differences between PTA and other parent organizations.

This document has been prepared to help you, the PTA leader, explain what truly differentiates PTA from all other parent groups and to dispel some of the myths that have circulated about our organization.

Defining the difference

- ❖ PTA is the nation's original parent group in schools, supporting and encouraging millions of parents to get involved in their children's education. We are the nation's premier resource for parent involvement.
- ❖ PTA is a national, grassroots, not-for-profit organization; neither the organization nor its leaders make any profit or receive any financial benefit from PTA activities.
- ❖ PTA is composed of nearly 6 million volunteers in 23,000 local units. These units are supported by a national and state system that provides them with information, resources, and training.
- ❖ PTA is run by volunteers and led by volunteers, and we are accountable to our members, parents, and schools. We give parents what they want—a way to help their children succeed.

All parent groups are not the same

- ❖ Although all parent groups have a local component—a way for passionate, dedicated parents to get involved in K–12 schools—many of the other groups focus solely on fundraising.
- ❖ Some parent organizations are actually owned and operated by a privately held for-profit business, making these organizations driven more by profits than by children.
- ❖ Fundraising for items not covered by school budgets is an important component for school groups, but we know that parents are interested and concerned about other school issues as well. In contrast to other parent groups, PTAs have a broader role to play, beyond fundraising, in the education of children.
- ❖ Parents who are knowledgeable on the issues that affect schools and student achievement can more effectively participate in local and district school decisions, and can speak up that our legislators need to allocate more funds for public schools.
- ❖ We at PTA know that advocacy works. If our members choose to get involved by working on issues that affect their children and schools, members receive the information and training they need to work effec-

tively at the local, state, and national levels for school funding, school construction, school safety, high-quality teachers, high nutrition standards in school lunch programs, after-school programs, and more. These efforts benefit all children, including those whose parents are members of non-PTA parent groups.

- ❖ PTA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization. Other independent parent groups must either complete a complicated process to file for tax-exempt status on their own or file taxes on all revenues received.

PTA membership is open to everyone

- ❖ PTA is an inclusive organization that is open to all adults who care about children and schools.
- ❖ We have learned that the main thing that parents want from schools is to help their children succeed academically, emotionally, and personally. PTA builds bridges between homes and schools. When a parent gets involved with PTA, the child who benefits most is his or her own.
- ❖ We reach out to diverse communities to allow parents to more fully integrate their children into the life of a school. We actively invite all parents to be involved in their children's education through participation in PTA. We work hard to bring mothers, fathers, teachers, school administrators, grandparents, mentors, foster parents, other caregivers, and community leaders into the organization.

Local PTAs make their own decisions

- ❖ Each of the 23,000 local units selects the programs and activities that it will undertake to address the needs of its local school and children. While National PTA creates many successful programs for local units to use, there are no PTA-mandated programs.
- ❖ State PTAs and National PTA provide support to help local PTAs succeed. For example, when working on local issues such as making a street intersection safer, upgrading school water taps to remove the threat of lead contamination, enhancing reading standards, and other school or district concerns, National PTA is a welcome resource. In most cases, we have probably seen the same challenges elsewhere in the country. We therefore can advise local PTAs on the best practices observed, issues surrounding the problem, and the outcome, and provide them contact information for additional details.

PTA offers relevant programs for schools and communities

National PTA programs are created to encourage and support parent involvement in children's education. Our programs are created with leading expert organizations on topics of importance to our members, at the

members' request. The programs are user-friendly and are free to PTAs. Within each of the programs offered, there are interesting activities, helpful evaluation tools, and tips to involve all the key players in a school community. No other parent group offers such credible and comprehensive programs to successfully engage families and communities.

Our programs connect parents to schools and recognize their achievements. Programs include

❖ **Building Successful Partnerships**—Based on the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, this program makes available presenters to speak to schools and communities about strengthening parent involvement and to implement parent involvement programs, plans, and policies in local schools.

❖ **Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification**—This program is a means for schools to assess their current parent involvement practices and earn recognition. The application process helps parents, teachers, and principals work as a team to measure current practices and plan for specific improvements in parent involvement. Receiving the Certification of Excellence is a positive recognition the whole school community can be proud to display.

❖ **Reflections Program**—The annual arts program allows more than 500,000 children and youth to express themselves through musical composition, photography, visual arts, and literature. For many school districts with limited funding, this program provides great value to the students and school community at no cost to the district.

❖ **Phoebe Apperson Hearst-National PTA Excellence in Education Partnership Award**—This award program recognizes a local PTA for its collaborative efforts with parents, families, educators, and community members in ongoing programs that encourage student success.

❖ **Back-to-School** program resources help PTAs get children ready for a successful school year; activities and materials for **Support for After-School Programs Week** help PTAs promote the benefits of school-based after-school programs; and **Teacher Appreciation Week** provides ideas and resources to PTAs so they can recognize the contributions made by teachers to their children's education.

❖ **School-Community Workshops** on student achievement, child nutrition, prevention of violence and bullying, and other topics provide a framework for PTAs to increase parental awareness about issues affecting their children.

❖ **Three for Me**—This program promotes volunteerism and organizes parent/family involvement. By asking parents to volunteer three hours per year in school for their child, Three for Me helps overcome perceived barriers to parent involvement today—time, access to a school, and diversity among families.

Fundraising

❖ PTA believes the core value of a parent is more important than only as a fundraiser. Fundraising is a means to carry out the goals and work of PTA. Fundraising events provide a valuable service and involve more parents in the school.

❖ *PTA Fundraising Essentials* is a guide National PTA publishes and distributes to every local PTA leader and public school principal across the country. It's filled with ideas, suggestions, success stories, resources, and more to help PTAs organize fundraising activities and, at the same time, support parent involvement initiatives.

Dues and benefits

❖ PTA members pay dues that include a small portion for the state and national offices. In return, local PTAs and members receive access to many valuable resources, information, and training programs.

❖ Benefits for local PTAs include

—The *Annual Resources for PTAs* reference manual, containing the National PTA Handbook and Bylaws; financial, legislative, membership, leadership, and marketing and public relations information; a variety of reproducible brochures; PowerPoint presentations and scripts; public service announcements; and more;

—A subscription for the local PTA president to *Our Children* magazine, which includes PTA best practices, tips for running a PTA, and a reproducible parent involvement newsletter in English and Spanish (additional subscriptions are available at the discounted member rate);

—The annual *PTA Fundraising Essentials*;

—National PTA Annual Convention registration information;

—A Back-to-School kit containing recruitment ideas and other materials to get the year started;

—Teacher Appreciation Week ideas and promotional/marketing items;

—Select resources developed in collaboration with National PTAs partners; and

—The PTA Unit Achievement Award recognition program.

❖ Benefits for individual members include

—Online resources, including *Our Children* magazine, full of parenting tips;

—Electronic newsletters to keep members informed of parenting and legislative issues;

—Special discounts and offers from National PTA Member Benefits Providers, including FedEx Kinko's and Barnes & Noble;

—Leadership training available online through e-learning courses and in-person at the National PTA Annual Convention and leadership workshops;

—Discounted rates for convention, *Our Children* magazine, and more;

—Member-to-Member Network, connecting PTA to Congress; and

—Benefits from the individual's state PTA.

❖ As a local affiliate of a national organization, local PTAs may be eligible for discounted insurance for special events that are not covered by the school insurance. Non-PTA parent groups usually must purchase more expensive insurance policies to cover special events and liabilities or leave their members at risk.

The voice for children

❖ Not all decisions affecting a child's school happen at the local level. That's why, from day one, it has been the Mission of National PTA to address the needs of *all* children, in every school, in every state, across the entire nation. Even if you're not a member, PTA still works for your child.

❖ PTA has the vision and determination to push for national education policies. We have been a driving force in establishing school lunch programs, after-school care, immunization programs, school bus safety, and TV rating standards before they became law.

❖ Today our government-relations staff is addressing the importance of parent involvement, safe and nurturing environments, and support for public schools.