

California State PTA
TOOLKIT
2007



6. Communications



Communications

The California State PTA strongly recommends
this entire Communications Section be copied for appropriate officers/chairmen.

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6.1 Communications Basics for PTA Leaders

6.1.1 Talking Points

Often very little time is available to make the point when talking about PTA to new audiences. These talking points and facts will help demonstrate the strength of the PTA.

The more these messages are said, the more likely it is that the messages will be heard and repeated.

- The PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer association working on children and youth issues. In California alone, we have approximately one million PTA members.
- The PTA represents every child in California schools. We work for every child, with one voice.
- The PTA is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian, and noncommercial organization that promotes the welfare of children and youth in home, school, community and place of worship.
- The PTA encourages communication and cooperation between parent and school 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.

Making PTA Talking Points Personal

Whether talking to a reporter or a school board member, people are interested in having issues expressed in human terms. Personal stories are essential elements in producing compelling stories.

These talking points are only intended as guidelines for speaking on behalf of PTA. They can be compelling only when injected with personal stories. The talking points can be made personal by considering:

- How can my personal PTA experience be part of these messages? How do these messages resonate with my experience as a teacher, a parent, a student, etc.?
- Why am I so committed to this work? How did I get involved? What needs to be improved at our school(s) or in our community? Can I share those stories?

6.1.2 The Visual Identity of the PTA

Visual clues are often the easiest way for people to recognize a product or organization that they trust.

Think about the brands you regularly buy. Whenever you purchase clothing, food or toys, the company's logo on the package represents all that you may like or dislike about the products you buy.

An organization's logo does the same thing.

PTAs in every community and every state stand for the same values. However, many people do not realize that each unit is part of a larger organization. In an effort to create a visual identity for PTAs throughout the country, the National PTA has revised their logo and asks that all PTAs adopt its style. The California State PTA has done so and encourages all unit, council and district PTAs to do the same.

The National PTA logo is available for download from the National PTA website. The site contains guidelines for using the logo including how to add the local PTA name.



6.1.3 Communicating with Confidence

PTA leadership provides ample opportunities to improve communication skills. A PTA leader learns to:

- Speak before the organization;
- Write letters, articles, and reports;
- Make public presentations; and
- Respond to the media.

6.1.3a REPRESENTING PTA

A PTA officer represents his or her unit, council or district PTA, and is also a local representative of the California State PTA and the National PTA.

Leaders

Know and reflect the PTA's official positions.

Refrain from making statements that would commit oneself or the organization to programs or projects upon which no action has been authorized or taken.

Build credibility as an individual so that one's comments are of value to the audience.

When a personal opinion is requested (and it will be), be sure to identify it as such.

6.1.3b PLANNING REMARKS

Announce what will be discussed.

Capture the attention of the group before delving into sharing the details.

Become knowledgeable about the organization—its structure and purpose—its positions and projects.

See your current PTA membership card for access to the National PTA Members Only website.

Keep abreast of current developments.

Be comfortable with yourself. If jokes or puns are not your strong point, do not tell them. Success comes from projecting your own personality.

Don't worry about "butterflies." We all have them—in fact, we need them to keep us from becoming complacent.

Do your homework. Few people can "wing it." The trick is to appear relaxed, and you can be if you are well prepared.

Be flexible. If necessary, adjust remarks to help meet the need at hand.

Find out in advance who the audience will be and why you were selected to speak.

Cultivate effective listening skills. If you are part of a program, listen to what other participants are saying. If the previous speaker "steals your thunder," comment on how one shares similar viewpoints and suggest, "Let's talk about this from another angle." Then continue with your own remarks.

Know when to stop. If a standing ovation is desired, sit down.

6.2 Tips for Promoting the PTA

6.2.1 Planning for Communications

Identify the Target Audience. It is important to clarify who you want to reach. The plan for reaching students may be very different from the one used to reach parents.

Choose the Medium. After the audience has been identified, consider the best way to reach them. Determine the ideal method of communication. Depending on the audience and the message, the method could be anything from creating a website to making a phone call.

Prepare the Message. Think through the message you want to convey. Whether making a speech to a large group or writing an article for the PTA newsletter, take the time to review and refine the PTA Talking Points (6.1.1) to concisely convey the message. Consider what the audience should understand from the message. All the energy should be focused on making that message clear—discard all the rest.

Use the PTA Style Guide. When preparing PTA communications, refer to the *California State PTA Style Guide* brochure (Chapter 9 Forms, Brochures) for capitalization and spelling styles specific to PTA and helpful punctuation and writing reminders.

For further information refer to

The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Strunk, William, Jr., and White, E.B. *The Elements of Style* (New York: Longman Publishing Group, 2000).

For PTA logo and usage, see National PTA's website, www.pta.org.

6.2.2 Background for Communications

6.2.2a ACCEPTING ADVERTISING

Become familiar with the noncommercial policy (Noncommercial Policy 1.3.1; 5.9.4). The noncommercial policy should be applied with good judgment, discretion, and common sense. Recognize that it is not meant to prohibit all contact, cooperation, or partnerships with commercial businesses.

School districts may have policies that forbid students to carry home publications containing commercial advertising or forbid the electronic posting of commercial advertising on a school website.

U.S. Postal Service rates for charitable publications with advertising differ from those without advertising, and postal permits may differ as well. The mailing may be rejected if these guidelines are not met.

All advertising shall be screened to ensure it meets PTA's high standards. This might mean accepting advertising from some businesses while rejecting others, which could create an embarrassing situation.

Political ads risk the appearance of endorsement, and also are likely to make the PTA publication unsuitable to send home with students.

Advertising may generate taxable **unrelated business income**. Red flags for this type of income include these situations:

- Providing, or agreeing to provide, excessive visual or verbal exposure of the sponsor's name, logo or corporate message. Associating the name of the sponsor with the name of a PTA event is not, by itself, advertising that would trigger the Unrelated Business Income Tax (UBIT) (Unrelated Business Income Tax 5.7.7).
- Basing the amount of exposure the sponsor's name and logo receives upon the amount of payment.
- For any publication medium containing advertising, the California State PTA strongly advises the printing of a disclaimer:

The mention of any business or service in this publication does not imply an endorsement by the PTA.

Avoid exploitation by individuals, businesses, and others who would appeal to the PTA's commitment to support schools by using the PTA newsletter, website, or other publications.

The California State PTA strongly recommends finding sponsors rather than accepting advertising. Sponsorship does not have the same potential problems as advertising.

6.2.2b ACKNOWLEDGING ASSISTANCE

Review Sponsorship vs. Endorsement 5.9.4a.

Thank funders and sponsors. One sentence should do it!

- The Sunshine PTA newsletter (website) is printed (posted) courtesy of John Doe Printers.
- The Sunshine PTA expresses grateful appreciation to the following merchants for making this publication possible:

John Doe Hardware

Mary Green Fabrics

Romano Pizza

- The Sunshine PTA thanks the Burger Place for their work with our students on the *Let's Do It! Recycling Program*.
- The Sunshine PTA expresses thanks to Neighborhood Bank for the use of its parking lot for the car wash.
- The Sunshine PTA wishes to thank KXYZ for the PTA membership promotion ads aired during our membership enrollment.
- Sunshine PTA thanks Romano Pizza for the generous offer to donate 10 percent of all sales made on _____ (date).
- Sunshine PTA will collect soup labels/cereal labels for the next semester. Call Jane Doe at 555.555.5555 for information.

6.2.2c COPYRIGHT LAWS

It is illegal to violate federal copyright law governing print matter, poetry, art, music and computer software. Use of computer software by multiple users requires a site license. Only computer “shareware” can be shared legally.

PTAs that publish newsletters, printed materials, and websites must abide by the copyright laws and must republish articles and reproduce art in an ethical manner.

Following are some simple rules regarding the use of articles and art that editors should observe:

- Permission should be secured to republish anything from another source.
- The letter of request (Fig. 6-1) or a record of the telephone call to the originator should be kept on file. The reply or a record of it should be kept on file. Print out a hard copy of any “granted” permission received via e-mail.
- Only a brief part of a written work may be quoted. This can be quoted only once, unless a new request is sent. Credit must be given to the source of the material.

- Laws are strict in the case of items that are creative in nature (e.g., art, literature, poetry, cartoons, and comics). Secure permission in advance in such cases. Poetry is considered public domain material 52 years after the year of copyright.
- California State PTA articles and artwork may be used by unit, council and district PTAs without permission. Read National PTA materials carefully to determine when permission to republish is required and always credit the source.
- It is most important that anything copyrighted, including original artwork, not be reproduced on an item to be sold or to advertise an event. Permission must be secured, or a lawsuit could result. The artist or the syndicating company will generally require a royalty on each item sold and a specific number of complimentary copies of the item.
- When permission to republish is required, the sample request letter can be used (Sample Request for Use of Copyrighted Material, Fig. 6-1).

6.2.3 Publication Guidelines

PTAs are encouraged to communicate with PTA members and the school community. Each unit must determine what will best meet the needs of its members and community, and what will fit within its budget. Options include:

- Brochures
- E-mail Mailing List
- E-newsletters
- Flyers
- Newsletters
- Website

6.2.3a PURPOSES OF PTA PUBLICATIONS

Encourage involvement with the child in the home and in the school.

Inform every family in the school of the aims and accomplishments of the unit.

Encourage attendance at PTA meetings and parent involvement in PTA projects and activities.

Foster cooperation with the school in keeping parents informed about school functions, regulations and/or procedures on child-related issues.

Inform the community about PTA activities and school functions.

6.2.3b GUIDELINES FOR ALL PUBLICATIONS

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

All material (e.g., newsletters, flyers, website postings, and print or electronic notices) must be cleared with the PTA president and school principal before printing. The

principal is responsible for the accuracy of school information and compliance with the State Education Code and school district policy (Article VI, Section 1i, *Bylaws for Local PTA/PTSA Units*).

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 suit. Positive, action-oriented messages are more useful to resolve a problem or refocus a controversy.

Incorporate the PTA logo in PTA communications. This will show a unity of effort and purpose, as well as demonstrate the unit's participation in a national organization. The PTA and PTSA logos are available on the www.pta.org website. Customize the logo by printing your unit name above the logo in Arial Black font.

Publish only a summary of actions taken from the PTA association meeting minutes.

Do not publish, without written permission, personal information about students or adults. This includes:

- Photographs;
- Home addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses;
- Class schedules.

Date all materials.

Make it easy for the reader to identify and find the PTA. List the following items:

- Name of the unit, council or district PTA;
- Contact information including an e-mail address and telephone number, so that a member can be reached for more information about the PTA (units should use school address, council and district PTA should use office or mailing address); and
- References to other PTA resources such as council and district PTA, California State PTA and National PTA publications and websites.

6.2.3c SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING CONTENT

Feedback is necessary to learn whether the publication is achieving its goals. Take an opinion poll at an executive board meeting. Insert a questionnaire in several issues to learn which information is most helpful to readers.

Encourage others to contribute to the newsletter, website, and other publications. Writers' work may be edited for space and clarity.

Be on the alert for coming events that should be publicized.

Report the results of events, publicize membership campaigns, or announce PTA award recipients.

Remember, people don't read, they skim. Make sure each message is easy to find. Keep messages brief and to the point. Strategically use bullets, quotes, charts, and graphics.

Check graphics and photographs for reproduction quality before printing.

Have two people proofread everything.

6.2.3d TRANSLATING MATERIALS

PTAs must work closely with the school to meet the language needs of those who receive the association publications.

To translate information and materials, seek help from bilingual parents on the executive board; teachers or support personnel in the classrooms or the school district; or the foreign language departments at local high schools, community colleges and universities.

Some units present side-by-side translations of articles on each page, while others print or post a separate issue. Still others offer all information in English with short recaps of major information in languages needed in their school community.

The California State PTA offers grants to unit, council and district PTAs to pay for translation services (Outreach Translation Grant for Unit, Council and District PTAs 7.17.2).

6.2.4 Nonprofit Mailing Permits

To mail newsletters and printed materials, a PTA may apply for the special nonprofit bulk mailing rate. Visit www.usps.com for complete information.

Contact the U.S. Postal Service for bulk mail instructions.

6.2.5 Online Communications

6.2.5a WEBSITE

Think strategically about the content and design of the site. Simplicity is the key to user-friendly design. How the site is structured will determine whether users can access the information they need. The quality of each page is determined by how well it serves its purpose.

Budget for maintenance. If funds are allocated for the website, do not spend the entire budget on the initial development.

Determine if the website will be hosted through a county office of education, the school district, or paid for by the PTA.

Materials that are benefits of membership must not be posted to the website, e.g., bylaws, minutes and financial reports.

Decide whether the website construction will be done commercially or by a volunteer:

- Forward edited copy by the expected date and keep a copy;
- Mark a sample hard copy so instructions are clear.

Links to information on the California State PTA and National PTA websites are more cost and time effective than repeating the same material.

It is recommended that written permission be obtained prior to posting any name, photograph, home phone number, or private e-mail address on a website.

See Website Chairman Job Description (10 Job Descriptions).

For additional information about establishing links, contact the California State PTA Website Chairman at website@capta.org or 916.440.1985 ext. 314.

6.2.5b E-MAIL

Consider establishing a PTA unit e-mail address. Some on-line service providers allow up to five users for the same fee/account. User names might include the PTA unit president, secretary, publication editor, and a vice president. These remain constant year to year even as officers change.

One volunteer could forward messages to other officers or school staff. A service used in this manner can avoid the publication of private e-mail addresses, phone numbers and home addresses of the PTA officers and chairmen.

In order to keep personal e-mail addresses private, these volunteers need to remember to initiate e-mail replies from the PTA e-mail address.

E-mail mailing lists are a cost-effective and efficient way to share information with the membership. A number of on-line service providers allow one to set up a group mailing list at no charge. Always blind-copy the recipients to avoid publicizing members' personal e-mail addresses. Note that e-mail lists larger than 25 addresses may trigger spam filters and may lead to the marking of the sender's address as suspicious. Members may have to opt-in for some listing services.

Honor requests for removal from the mailing list. Delete obsolete addresses.

An e-newsletter is a time- and cost-effective way to share information with a large number of people. Typically it is an informational update sent via e-mail to members of an electronic mailing list (Sample e-newsletter Fig. 6-2).

When sending an e-newsletter via e-mail, be sure to use a "text-only" format without graphic elements. HTML-formatted newsletters/e-mails are incompatible with some e-mail systems.

An alternative is to e-mail a link to a web-posted HTML-formatted newsletter.

Keep the e-newsletter brief; provide short summaries of new information available online at the unit's or other specific pages being discussed. This allows the reader to get a preview and jump to the site easily.

6.2.6 Print Communications

6.2.6a NEWSLETTERS

In a four- (or eight-) page newsletter, use pages 1, 3 and the back page for the most important articles. Use high-contrast headlines, pull quotes, or graphics in groups of twos and threes on a page. An unbalanced page is the strongest. Try to create a good clear direction for the reader's eye to follow on each page—usually a "Z."

Two columns are easiest to read and take up less space. Three columns will add design flexibility and allow the use of photos. Some white space within the design will help the reader to focus on content.

Headlines are to inform. They break up the page like a graphic. Headlines are easier to read when placed flush with the left hand margin of each column. Be consistent in capitalization, whether capitalizing the first letter of each word or just the first word.

"All caps" (capital letters) passages are difficult to read.

6.2.6b PRINT PREPARATION

Efficient and timely distribution is crucial to the publication process.

A table of contents or "What's Inside" helps increase readership for multi-page newsletters.

Illustrations, graphics or photos should be used sparingly and chosen with the full page composition in mind. Quotes or subtitles that are offset from the text function like informational graphics.

Pictures of people should be cropped at the body joints. The head of an individual should be no smaller than a dime. Keep group shots to less than six people.

Printing a newsletter (or photocopying) depends on the budget, time, equipment and talents available. If the newsletter is to be copied on a machine at the school site, PTA has the responsibility for making arrangements—in advance—with site personnel for the use of copying equipment, which may include purchase of paper and ink, toner and other supplies. Arrange for use of equipment at times convenient for staff.

If printing is done off the school site, obtain bids from at least three print shops before choosing one. To obtain accurate prices, present each with exactly the same information. Anything other than camera-ready copy will cost extra.

Ask what the turn-around time is for the finished print job.

Give the edited copy to the printer by the expected date.

Include written instructions. Keep a duplicate of all copy and instructions submitted. Ask for a “proof” to approve before the copies are made to double-check placement and quality of pages.

If the newsletter is mailed, labels and mailing lists should be regularly and carefully checked. Inquire if the association can use or purchase school district labels. Discard duplicate labels and mail only one newsletter to each household. Mailing is the best guarantee that the newsletter will reach its readers, and allows inclusion of PTA support and oppose positions on ballot measures.

6.2.6c FLYERS AND BROCHURES

Review Advocacy Policy 11 (4.2.5k).

Flyers are a good way to publicize upcoming events, and brochures can tell prospective members about the PTA. When creating either, remember that less is more. Keep the text short and straightforward, and keep the design clean and simple.

Select graphics carefully. Reduce clutter as much as possible. Judicious use of white space makes the page more readable. Do not feel a need to fill the page.

If you are using a flyer to publicize an event:

- Title of the event;
- Name and address of the location;
- Day, date and time;
- Host, cosponsors, and important attendees;
- Brief description of the purpose of the event; and
- Phone number or e-mail address for more information.

When creating brochures, consider including a reply card. Reserve a panel of the brochure to invite readers to ask for more information or become members.

6.2.6d FOR MORE INFORMATION

Many books and online sources on newspaper design give inspiration and more detailed information. One is

Williams, Robin. *The Non-Designer's Design Book: Design and Typographic Principles for the Visual Novice*. (Berkeley: Peach Pit Press, 1994).

6.2.7 Publicize PTA to the Larger Community

PTA has enjoyed excellent name recognition with the public for many years. However, it is important to remember that the local community may not be familiar with the actual functions of the PTA.

PTAs often have special programs that they support with many volunteer hours. 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 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. Do not forget the many community websites and online bulletin boards now available. Send PTA electronic and print communications to all of these outlets so they are “in the loop” on PTA activities.

Proclamations are one way for elected officials to show their commitment to the association. Encourage school district officials to pass a proclamation supporting PTA membership, PTA Founders Day, the PTA’s charter anniversary, etc. (Sample Proclamation Fig. 3-8).

6.2.7a GENERATE PTA PUBLICITY

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

Step One

Incorporate the event or program theme and PTA logo into the public relations campaign. This will show a unity of effort and purpose, as well as capitalizing on PTA name recognition.

Step Two

Develop a press kit that contains press contact information with information on the event or campaign, giving compelling reasons to support it—make your case for this project. Include information on other current activities of your unit, as well as a brief history of the PTA.

press kit:

Preparing a press kit helps make the PTA look professional.

Step Three

Call the local newspapers and radio and television stations to find out who covers education and child welfare issues. Give each reporter a call to introduce the PTA and mention that the unit is adding his or her name to the mailing list. Follow up with an e-mail. Then mail a press kit with a second note to each person. Remember that cable TV services are required to provide some local access. They may offer additional exposure by airing PTA public service announcements and covering the news in the PTA’s press releases.

Step Four

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

Step Five

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

6.2.7b INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Before speaking to the media, make sure to understand and 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 is the PTA message?
- Who supports PTA's efforts? Why?
- Who opposes PTA's efforts? Why?

6.2.7c MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

Plan important points and make them early and often. Remember, an interview is an opportunity to tell PTA's story and to make our case. Prepare PTA points in advance, and use every question as an opportunity to address PTA's agenda (Talking Points 6.1.1; Communicating with Confidence 6.1.3).

To the media, the PTA representative is an authority by virtue of the PTA leadership position. It helps, if feeling nervous, to focus on the good the PTA hopes to do. Think of what you would say to your neighbor to convince him to help.

If the reporter asks questions difficult to answer or outside your area of expertise, say, "I don't know, but I will get back to you in time for your deadline." In the meantime, consult with officers/chairmen who have the information and make that deadline!

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 of conflict by the reporter 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. Always correct the information in an informative and helpful manner.

Watch body language. Crossed arms or arms on hips signal defensiveness. Open arms convey a welcoming, open attitude.

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 the point as often and as logically as possible. It may feel repetitive, but when the interview is edited, the clearest or most emotional statement is likely to be the one that is covered in the news.

6.2.7d SPEAKING IN SOUND BITES

Keep messages short and simple to attract and sustain the attention of the audience, whether speaking with a

potential member, the media, or the school board. Here are some tips to help planning:

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

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.

Evoke pictures. If it is possible to make people see what one is talking about, 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*.

sound bite:
Approximately seven seconds or 25 words.

6.2.7e LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

One of the most important places in the newspaper is the "Letters" page. Through a letter to the editor, one can reinforce a PTA message and concisely state the PTA position on an issue. The printed letter can be copied and distributed to help others get a clear idea of the position.

Only present PTA positions with which the PTA has agreed. If this is your personal opinion, do not invoke your PTA position in the letter or in your signature.

Getting the PTA position into the newspaper through a letter to the editor often gives that position additional credibility. Here are some tips to consider when writing the letter.

Explain why you are writing. If you are responding directly to an article you read in the newspaper, state the article's headline and publication date.

Focus the message. Limit content to the one key point for the 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 the PTA point of view.

6.2.7f 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 an issue and the proposed solution.

Planning the Op-Ed

- What is the subject to be covered in the 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 PTA 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? (Where We Stand 4.4, 4.5, 4.6)

6.2.7g CREATING NEWS

Here are six tips that may increase the PTA's 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 rundown classrooms? 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 PTA.
3. Look at programs your PTA presents that improve the lives of children and families. Many breaking news stories are about family needs, and your PTA's activity is a story about finding solutions.
4. Tie the events to anniversaries and annual events. The fall is "back-to-school" time for most schools. PTA membership enrollment campaigns 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 the unit programs to those dates.
5. Special events. Announce speakers' forums, cultural events or other activities that may be of interest to a large audience. Invite local VIPs, and let the media know who will be attending.
6. To attract an editor to a story, one needs a "hook" or "angle." Tell the story in a new way. It is not news to just say that 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 play a large part in determining if the editor will assign the article to a reporter.

6.2.7h PRESS RELEASES

To alert the media to a PTA event, program or campaign, send out a press release and follow up with phone calls and e-mails. It is important to use the news release to concisely answer the questions Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? and to give a PTA contact phone number and e-mail address for more information, or to verify the information sent. This contact must be someone who will answer e-mails and phone messages promptly.

News writing style is brief, simple, and to the point. State your main point up front and in compelling terms, as most press releases are skimmed quickly.

All news releases need to be approved by the president and the school principal before being sent to the media.

Whenever appropriate, incorporate news from or links to current publications and news releases of the unit, council and district PTAs, and State and National PTA.

A news release should be e-mailed at least two weeks before the event with follow-up calls and/or e-mails one week ahead and the day before the event. However, feature or advance sections or weekly papers may need more notice, and a *Save the Date* notice is always a good idea. Discuss the advance lead time required with the local newspaper page editor. Include a hard copy of the release in the press kit on the day of the event (Sample Press Release Fig. 6-3).

Keep press releases short and concise. Include links to more information or put supportive or historical material on a separate page after the release. Double-space the text if mailed or faxed.

The whole release should hold to one page.

E-mailed releases should also be very short, with links to additional material and contact e-mails.

Every release should carry the PTA representative's name as the contact for further information, telephone number, e-mail address, the date and, of course, the name of the PTA. Be clear about what is press contact information and what is to be publicized as a phone or e-mail for the public to use.

For More Information

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

6.2.7i PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Date)

CONTACT

(Name), (Phone Number), (E-mail)

(HEADLINE: KEEP IT SHORT
AND USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS)

1st paragraph: Briefly explain what is happening, who is involved, and when and where it is taking place.

2nd paragraph: Why is this event significant and news-worthy?

3rd paragraph: Engaging quote from a parent or an expert involved that emphasizes how significant the event is.

4th paragraph: Other pertinent details including, speakers' names and affiliations, as well as descriptions of any visual details of the event that will provide photo opportunities for reporters.

Use a centered ### to indicate the end of a release.

6.2.8 Press Conference Agendas and Kits

Prepare press kits in advance of the event for members of the press that include the following:

1. Agenda.
2. Previously sent press release - Includes contact telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.
3. Fact Sheet on topic.
4. Brief biographies of key speakers.
5. Background sheet about the PTA.

Be prepared to e-mail or fax this information to the press upon request.

###

Federal Communication Commission rules require that association must obtain the signed, written consent of a recipient, even association members, in order to fax meeting notices. (Facsimile Consent Form, Chapter 9 Forms)

See Job Descriptions, Chapter 10, for:

- *Publications Coordinator
- *Public Relations
- *Website

6.2.9 Advertising and Public Service Announcements

Local businesses and media outlets may be interested in helping to promote the PTA. Take advantage of free airtime, if it is available. To surmount the competition, develop relationships with the community service/public

affairs director at community television, radio, and cable stations.

Ask a local business or organization to sponsor an ad in local papers promoting PTA.

Some neighborhood newspapers grant free advertising to nonprofit organizations. Try creating an ad for the local PTA and placing it in the help-wanted section.

Advertising and PSAs should complement other strategies. Announce the launch of them on the PTA website and in the newsletter. One can also use the release of advertising as an opportunity to get news coverage.

6.3 Guidelines for Communications Coordinators

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

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

An effective communications team may include one or more of the following:

- Public Relations Coordinator
- Publications Coordinator or Newsletter Editor
- Webmaster
- Television/Media Literacy Coordinator

6.3.1 Public Relations Coordinator

Work with the unit's elected officers to develop an annual communications plan. The plan should complement the goals of the organization.

Be a source for the media; watch for opportunities for PTA officers to be interviewed on issues and programs the PTA has identified.

Create an awareness of PTA actions in the mass media (e.g., newspapers, radio, websites, television, PSAs), emphasizing student/parent programs and projects.

Open avenues of communication in the local area through publicity in newspapers, magazines, radio, and television (both commercial and public access), and publicize the official PTA positions on issues, when deemed appropriate by the president and executive board.

Obtain and become familiar with the *National PTA Quick-Reference Guide* (marketing and public relations) and the *California State PTA Toolkit*. Subscribe to *PTA in California*, *The Communicator*, and *Our Children* (Resources and Subscriptions in the Introduction section of the *California State PTA Toolkit*). The unit president

has all these items. Cost of materials should be included in local unit budget.

Review information available on www.capta.org and www.pta.org.

Meet with predecessor, if possible, to obtain the procedure book and to review procedures and other materials. These materials should include the following information: The name, address and contact person (or position) for the local newspaper(s), local radio station(s), local TV and cable station(s) and other local news media, such as community bulletin boards, shopping news, school district newsletter, and County Office of Education newsletter.

Update local media list at the beginning of term and at least every six months. The school district Public Information Office and County Office of Education are valuable resources.

Keep in contact with council and district PTA public relations chairmen, attend workshops, and make reports as requested.

Let the local press know who holds the position. Learn the styles and deadlines of the local media and each media contact person in the area. The media should be aware of the chairman as a source of factual information.

Assist the president and other officers in their preparation of remarks for media interviews. Always obtain the president's consent before agreeing to be interviewed.

6.3.1a NEEDS TO LEARN

PTA's history; Purposes of the PTA, Mission Statement of the California State PTA; California State PTA Core Values; California State PTA Legislation Platform; and the PTA's basic policies, procedures, and programs (Know the PTA 1.1-1.3; Legislation Platform 4.2.4).

About the local media: who they are, who is interested in PTA issues, and how to contact them.

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

6.3.1b ESSENTIAL TOOLS

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

Helpful tools: fax machine and computer with Internet access and widely used software for distributing press materials.

Reference materials: grammar book, dictionary, thesaurus, and *California State PTA Toolkit*, *National PTA Quick-Reference Guide*.

6.3.1c PUBLICITY RECORD BOOK

The public relations coordinator is responsible for maintaining a publicity record book that includes press releases, news clippings and copies of other publicity for the PTA year. This serves as a valuable reference for

the incoming president and public relations chairman and, after a year, the book may be presented to the president whose term it covers. The unit historian may wish to also include publicity in a scrapbook or other documentation that remains with the unit historical records.

6.3.2 Publications Coordinator

Review www.capta.org and www.pta.org.

Subscribe to *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.

Follow council or district PTA guidelines and attend workshops for publications chairmen.

As the new editor of a newsletter or website, gather all available information from the predecessor. Review past issues. Study newsletters and websites from other unit, council and district PTAs. Secure samples from council or district PTAs (Online Communications 6.2.5; Print Communications 6.2.6).

Include the cost of materials: paper, ink, computer equipment and/or software, and postage in the association budget.

Set newsletter, flyer and website deadlines and stick to them. Advise contributors of the due dates frequently. Ask the PTA president to include the items "newsletter and website article assignments" and "publication copy due dates" on all meeting agendas.

Encourage officers and chairmen to keep the publications coordinator informed about their projects and urge them to contribute short articles and reports for the newsletter. Advise all potential contributors that material will be edited for space and form (grammar, punctuation, spelling and accuracy of information) for all publications.

California State PTA materials may be reprinted; please credit the source. Read National PTA materials carefully to determine when permission to reprint is required. Observe copyright laws by obtaining permission to reprint all non-PTA materials (Copyright Laws 6.2.2c; Sample Request for Use of Copyrighted Material, Fig. 6-1).

Send copies of the newsletter to council and district PTA presidents. The California State PTA newsletter editor would also appreciate receiving a copy. Leave several copies in the school office.

Save a good clear copy of each issue for the publicity record book. Leave two or three copies of each issue in the procedure book.

Keep a well-organized procedure book, including the following information, for the next coordinator:

- Number of issues or postings
- Months issued
- Beginning date

- Copy deadline for newsletter, e-newsletter, and web-site updates
- Number of copies required
- New newsletter volume number and the commencing date
- Type of duplicating process used
- Materials and printing supplies:
 - Where purchased
 - Amount purchased
 - Cost of materials
 - Supplies on hand
- Equipment or software serial #/warranty
- Distribution method
- For print medium: U.S. Postal Service regulations and mailing permit information, if mailed
- For electronic medium: Internet service provider, e-mail account names and passwords, Webmaster contact and account information
- Council and district PTA publication chairman's contact information
- Webmaster addresses of the California State PTA and National PTA to establish a link from their websites to the local PTA's website.

See Publications Coordinator Job Description.

6.3.2a CONSIDERATIONS FOR YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLS

Develop a plan to reach all members, whether they are on- or off-track.

Time newsletters and flyers to be sent home right before track goes off and right after track returns.

**6.4 Television and Media Literacy —
Communications**

The California State PTA believes it is necessary to develop an aware viewing public of children and adults who will limit their television viewing to carefully selected programs, and who will be able to understand the explicit and the implicit messages in TV programs and commercials. PTA further believes that TV viewing skills should be included in the K-12 curriculum in the schools and encouraged by the parents in the home. (See *California State PTA Toolkit*, Advocacy Section, Position Statements: Mass Media and the Family 4.5.43; Television and Video Viewing 4.5.69; Television Programming 4.5.70 and Video Game Sites 4.5.74.)

6.4.1 Develop Media Literacy and Television Viewing Skills

Be selective regarding the programs children view; distinguish between fantasy and reality; and recognize gender stereotypes and racial prejudices portrayed on television.

Children whose TV viewing time is limited are less aggressive, and adult viewers who limit their viewing have a less violent picture of society.

Children who watch less television usually read more, are less likely to be overweight, have more friends, and are more likely to develop hobbies.

Good viewing skills become a family affair and promote valuable discussion among family members, and viewers learn to recognize the powerful influence of commercial advertising.

6.4.2 Recommended Actions for Schools and PTAs

Review California State PTA Mass Media Position Statement (4.5). Obtain and promote PTA materials pertaining to media literacy and television viewing skills.

Sponsor parent/staff workshop(s) to learn how viewing television affects children.

Plan a program on critical viewing skills and television literacy techniques for parents.

Keep parents informed of appropriate, entertaining, and educational programs for young people.

Promote a “No TV” day or week. Ask parents and students to turn off the television for a limited period of time under controlled conditions. This helps parents, teachers, and students to understand the television’s role and provides time for them to investigate other forms of entertainment, such as reading, games, and family activities.

Use local television stations as field trip locations or invite television writers, producers, and technicians to speak to students.

Encourage students to create their own television program using videos, monitors, computers, website and Power Point presentations.

6.4.3 Recommended Actions at Home

Through PTA newsletters, flyers, brochures, and programs, PTAs can encourage parents to:

- Watch television with their children; be aware of what their older children are watching.
- Discuss issues from television programs and commercials with their children.
- Develop alternatives to television viewing.
- Choose programs for their children that have positive characters and plots.
- Set time limits for television viewing.

-
- Write television stations, sponsors and the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) expressing their positive as well as negative views on television programming.
 - Remember, it is OK to turn off the TV!

6.4.4 Additional Resources

Cable in the Classroom
25 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20001-1431
202.222.2335; www.ciconline.org

The Children's Partnership
1351 3rd Street Promenade, Suite 206
Santa Monica, CA 90401
310.260.1220; www.childrenspartnership.org

(Your PTA Name)



everychild.one voice.

(Your PTA Address)

(Your PTA telephone and e-mail address)

Date

Michael Jones
Los Angeles Times
Times Mirror Square
Los Angeles, CA 99999

Dear Mr. Jones:

We would like to reproduce a segment of your article (or artwork), entitled,

_____.

With your permission, it will be printed in our newsletter (posted on our website, distributed through our e-mail list).

Yours truly,

Name
Publications Coordinator
(Your Unit Name) PTA
(Address)
(Telephone number or e-mail address)
(Fax number, if applicable)

When permission to republish is required, this sample request can be used.

Fig.6-1 Sample Request for Use of Copyrighted Material

THE HUDSON ELEMENTARY HERALD

Hudson Elementary School
555 Main Street
Anytown U.S.A.
555.555.5555

PTA News from Hudson Elementary

October 14, 2006

Upcoming Meetings:

PTA Association Meeting scheduled for Tuesday 6:30 PM. @ the School Library. Budget revise, fundraiser approval, general business.

From the Principal:

Great news! The city has decided to post a crossing guard at the corner of Cross St. and Gibson. The crossing guard starts Monday. Thanks to all parents who called the city. We couldn't have accomplished this without you!

Parent Involvement:

Join us Friday for the Internet Safety program for parents and students. The D.A.'s office has a great program to help us keep our children safe. Auditorium, 3:30-4:30 PM.

Membership News:

This year's campaign, "Get Roped into PTA," has rounded up 325 members-so far. You can join anytime! We will have a membership table at the association meeting and at other PTA-sponsored activities and programs. We appreciate your continued support!

School District Information:

The Board of Trustees meets every other Wednesday at 7:00 PM. Next meeting is October 21 at the USD.

Community News:

Join us in the Community Parade Saturday 10:00 AM. Hudson Elementary PTA has worked hard on this year's float. Your support has been invaluable. Hope to see you there to cheer us on!

- * Gift Wrap sale benefiting our Reflections Program—to be approved at next association meeting. Come give us your input.
- * Jog-A-Thon benefiting Emergency Preparedness—we want our kids to be safe! (already approved)
- * Book Fair benefiting School Library Needs Committee (already approved)

Health Committee:

Flu season is just around the corner. Flu shots are available at various locations. Check the paper.

Helpful Links:

California State PTA	www.capta.org
National PTA	www.pta.org

If you have questions, comments, or news, contact newsletter@hudsonelementaryherald.com

An e-newsletter effectively gives an informational update and can be shared with a large number of people.

Fig. 6-2 Sample e-newsletter

(Your PTA Name)



everychild.one voice.

(Your PTA Address)

(Your PTA telephone and e-mail address)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 1, 2006

CONTACT

Joe Smith 555.555.5555

jsmith@jsmith.org

PTA MEMBERSHIP ON THE RISE

Elementary, CA—PTA membership at Elementary School PTA has risen 30 percent over last year's enrollment. More than 900 parents, teachers, grandparents, and community members registered during Elementary School's PTA membership enrollment last month.

"We are very proud of the parent and teacher involvement at Elementary School," stated Lloyd Jones, Elementary PTA membership chairman. "Ninety-seven percent of our students' parents and 92 percent of the school's teachers are members of the PTA."

Jones also noted an increase in community involvement. More than 67 members represent grandparents and other local citizens interested in addressing issues facing today's children.

Elementary School PTA President Lydia Vasques believes that the increase in membership is due to PTA programs and activities. "People want to belong to an association that does worthwhile things. Our programs give parents and community members quality information they can use when raising their children."

Elementary PTA starts off each fall with a back-to-school orientation day and, throughout the year, schedules informative activities such as a day-long health fair and back-to-school safety programs.

To find out more about Elementary PTA and its programs, visit www.elementaryPTA.org.

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Every release should carry your name as the contact for further information. Include your telephone number, e-mail address, the date and, of course, the name of your PTA.

Fig. 6-3 Sample Press Release

**PLEASE REMOVE THIS PAGE
AND REPLACE WITH PROGRAMS TAB**

**PLEASE REMOVE THIS PAGE
AND REPLACE WITH PROGRAMS TAB**