



Communications Guidelines for PTA Leaders

Unaffiliated Parent Groups

The following Key Messages (page 1), Communications “Do’s & Do Not’s” (page 2), Frequently Asked Questions resource (pages 3-5), and Sample Web Copy (page 6) are provided to assist PTA leaders in responding to inquiries regarding the differences between PTA and unaffiliated parent groups.

If you have related questions, please contact LaWanda Toney, National PTA Director of Strategic Communications, at ltoney@pta.org or (703) 518-1242.

Key Messages

- While there are many differences between PTAs and other parent groups, the most fundamental is our mission. PTA is a nationwide network of families and educators advocating for children at all levels of decision making, and other parent groups are comprised of families working only at an individual school.
- As a nationwide network of more than 22,000 schools and four million families, PTA provides parents, educators, and other concerned adults with an organized way to improve education, health, and safety conditions for America’s children. In addition to involvement at the school, PTA parents have a voice with district, state, and even national level conversations.
- Other parent groups not affiliated with PTA are sometimes referred to by the generic acronym PTO. These groups focus exclusively on issues at their school and are not part of a larger, organized network. PTA encourages these groups to join us because we believe we are stronger together, but we also understand their decision not to be part of PTA and support their localized efforts to enhance family engagement.

Communications Do's & Do Not's

- **Do** be positive when describing the work of other parent groups. We believe membership in a nationwide network is the best way to make a difference for our children, but we applaud and support all efforts to improve family engagement.
- **Do Not** use the acronym PTO as if it is in the same category as PTA. Many people believe PTO is a brand name like PTA (as opposed to a generic term for unaffiliated parent groups) and our frequent use of this acronym has reinforced this notion.
- **Do** use “other parent groups” or “unaffiliated parent groups” as the generic term instead.
- **Do Not** use comparison charts listing the convenience and administrative benefits of PTA, such as the cost of insurance. People join PTA for our mission, and not because of these business features.
- **Do** utilize the Sample Web Copy (page 6) on your website and in other communications describing “The PTA Advantage” and include state-specific examples to help illustrate PTA’s mission in action.
- **Do Not** make statements about the PTO Today website, magazine, or other materials. They are products of School Family Media, Inc., a for-profit media and advertising company that offers services to all parent groups, including PTAs. School Family Media, Inc., is one of hundreds of individuals and groups that provide services to PTAs.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How should I answer the question “What’s the difference between PTA and another parent group”?

A. PTA is the oldest and largest child advocacy association in America comprised of 22,000 schools and four million families. As part of this nationwide network, parents have a voice in decisions that impact their children, not only in their individual schools, but also at the district, state and national levels. This mission is unique to PTA. Other parent groups work on behalf of children within their school yard, but have no organized way to impact decisions beyond the fence.

Sometimes people refer to these unaffiliated groups as a parent teacher organization or PTO. This is only a generic acronym for groups not affiliated with PTA.

The differences between PTAs and other parent groups are many, but we have one similarity. All parent-school groups form to support children’s education. We commend all of the caring adults who join a parent group to support student learning and develop positive partnerships with their school’s officials. PTA believes, however, that the issues that affect our children today extend beyond their individual schools.

Many of the benefits our children receive today, such as universal kindergarten, the National School Lunch Program and a juvenile justice system, were accomplished as a result of PTA’s advocacy; a parent group working alone would likely not be able to impact issues like these.

Q. What sets PTA apart from other parent groups?

A. PTA is a thriving child advocacy association. Our four million members form a nationwide network of families united in their commitment to improving the education, health, and safety of all children. We speak with one voice for every child.

PTA is more connected, dedicated, and advocacy-minded than ever before. We do not limit ourselves to bake sales; we strive for meaningful policy changes and educational improvements. The results of our mission benefit all children nationwide, even those who do not attend a PTA school.

PTAs working to bring healthy options to their school cafeterias band together to help influence the national nutrition standards for school breakfasts and lunches. PTAs worried about school safety pool their ideas and take their shared concerns to the school board to secure systemic improvements. And PTAs facing school budget cuts rally to preserve state and federal appropriations for education.

Moreover, PTAs have access to several benefits, including dozens of national programs, experts, and turnkey resources. PTAs also are provided regular updates and advice in the form of e-newsletters, e-blasts, social media, PTA.org, *Our Children* magazine, a robust back-to-school kit of resources, webinars and e-learning courses. Additionally, PTAs are eligible for prestigious national awards and millions of dollars in grants to help build their capacity and skills and make a difference in their school community. Partners and sponsors, like LifeLock, Lifetouch, Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation and Amazon Kindle, make their benefits and cost savings available to PTAs nationwide as well. All members are invited to participate in PTA conventions (national and state) as well as our legislative conferences.

Administrative factors also set PTA apart from other parent groups. PTA offers a national and state infrastructure with staff to assist PTAs in securing nonprofit status, filing government paperwork, creating bylaws, purchasing low-cost insurance and training leaders. These support services are available at no additional cost after membership.

Q. Some parents just want to help their child at school, so why should they form a PTA at their school?

A. Many of the decisions that impact children’s education are not made by educators at their schools. These decisions frequently come from district or state officials. PTA gives parents a united and powerful voice, a seat at the table where decisions are made, and the tools to influence. Below are two illustrations of PTA’s mission in action. *[Note: each PTA should develop several state-specific examples.]*

- Washington State PTA worked to secure the passage of major state education reforms, sweeping changes that an independent parent group could not have accomplished alone.
- Florida PTA, on behalf of all parents, helped to defeat a piece of state legislation that held the potential for for-profit management companies and other corporate interests to take over public schools.

Q. What is the best way to present “The PTA Advantage” online and through PTA communications?

A. National PTA has four preferences for communicating about “The PTA Advantage.”

1. Avoid using the PTO acronym as if it were a brand name. We prefer for you to use “unaffiliated parent groups” as a generic category.
2. Focus more on the difference in mission between PTA and unaffiliated parent groups.
3. Focus less on the convenience and administrative benefits of PTA membership. While practical considerations, these attributes are not as inspiring as our mission.
4. Avoid comparison charts.

We recommend that you review and revise your website and membership materials as soon as possible to reflect this guidance.

Q. Can other parent groups use the PTA name? What about companies that use the name in their marketing or promotions?

A. Groups cannot use the PTA name without our prior written approval. While PTA has become a part of American vocabulary, in the same way that people might call any soft drink “Coke” or any facial tissue “Kleenex.” Like these brands, PTA is protected with a number of federal trademarks and has been so for more than 100 years.

Companies cannot use the PTA name in any manner that claims or could reasonably be inferred to suggest a relationship that does not exist. Companies may, however, reference PTA in statements of fact; for example, Company X can state that it offers services to PTAs.

Q. What should I do if I see other people and groups using the PTA name?

A. If you see the PTA name used in an inappropriate way or have related questions, please contact LaWanda Toney, National PTA Director of Strategic Communications, at ltoney@pta.org or (703) 518-1242. Please attach a screen shot or link to the PTA name in use.

Sample Web Copy

The PTA Advantage

PTA is the oldest and largest child advocacy association in America. PTA is comprised of four million parents, teachers, grandparents, caregivers, foster parents and other caring adults who share a commitment to improving the education, health, and safety of all children. We speak with one voice for every child.

Today, the issues that affect our children extend beyond their individual schools. PTA's nationwide network provides parents with the forum and tools to collectively influence the decisions that affect children not only at their schools, but also throughout their districts, within their states, and across the nation. This mission is unique to PTA.

Many of the benefits our children receive today, such as universal kindergarten, the National School Lunch Program, and a juvenile justice system, were accomplished as a result of PTA's mission.

*In [Insert state], PTA has achieved several notable improvements for children, including:
[Insert short bulleted list]*

With PTA, families also have access to important benefits, including:

- *Dozens of national programs, experts, and turnkey resources*
- *Regular updates and advice in the form of e-newsletters, PTA.org, Our Children magazine, and a robust back-to-school kit of resources*
- *[Insert state-level benefits]*
- *Leadership development through webinars and e-learning courses*
- *Millions of dollars in grants to help build PTA capacity and skills and make a difference in their school community*
- *Prestigious national awards*
- *Cost savings from national retailers and other PTA partners*
- *Invitations to PTA conventions as well as our conferences for emerging minority leaders, male mentors, and advocates*
- *Support services and staff to help establish and manage your PTA*

To join PTA or discuss how to bring PTA to your school, please contact [Insert name and contact information].