

Frederick County Council



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Basic Advocacy Practices

To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth. The third purpose of the National PTA refers to *advocacy*. What you do to improve laws, policies, and conditions on behalf of children is advocacy, whether in your community or at the state and federal levels. PTA defines *advocacy* as the act of mobilizing individuals and local PTAs to work with the state and National PTAs to spark changes in programs and policies that benefit children.

An effective advocacy campaign is built on activities and events that keep the PTA issue visible and motivate people to act.

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Developing an Advocacy Program

I. Choosing an Issue

- Focus on an **issue**, not a *problem*. For example, a *problem* could be crowded classrooms, but the **issue** could be inadequate facilities or lack of funding.
- Decide how the issue fits within the PTA's Mission and Purposes.
- Determine how your issue concerns people in your school and community.
- Think about what you hope the desired outcome will be.
- Will you be able to effectively communicate about your issue in understandable terms to those within and outside the PTA?
- Does your membership want you to work on the issue? **If you are speaking as a PTA, then you must have the official support of your membership.** Remember, only the president has the authority to speak for the PTA but he/she may delegate this responsibility to another member.

II. Researching the Issue

- Find as many sources of information about the issue as possible.
- Research the arguments both for and against.
- Know who supports and opposes the issue.
- Conduct surveys and opinion polls in your community to determine how your community feels about the issue.
- Use National PTA, Maryland PTA, and the PTA Council of Frederick County, Inc. resolutions and position statements on the issue.

III. Organizing for Action

- The key elements to a well thought-out campaign are a strong message, outreach, and planning.
- Set long and short term goals.
- Understand what is required in terms of money, time, and commitment.
- Define your target audience – those who can affect the outcome of the issue (school board, legislators, voters, etc.)
- Contact Council – there may be other PTAs who have your same issue – working together may bring about the change more quickly.

Communicating PTA's Position

There are many ways in which PTA members can speak with 'one voice' for children. Presenting your personal perspective when communicating with policy makers, yet knowing that PTA's advocacy strength comes from our **collective voice**, is important to relay the PTA message.

I. Testifying and Speaking in Public

- Prepare both content and delivery – remember to be polite and respectful.
- Know your audience; say what's important to them.
- Emphasize key points over and over.
- Use visual aids, if appropriate.
- Be brief.

II. Personal Visits

- Schedule an appointment, and if possible identify who from the PTA will attend.
- Draft an agenda and stick to it.
- Keep the group small, too large a group can prevent meaningful discussion.
- Be open to questions. If you don't know the answer, explain that you will get back with more information.
- Ask how the policy maker will vote on the issue.

III. Other Communication Methods

- **Letters and Postcards**
 1. Give the PTA position.
 2. Show how the issue will affect the legislator's constituents.
 3. Explain what action you want to happen.
- **Phone Calls, E-mail, Faxes**
 1. When phoning, ask to speak to the lawmaker or an aide who handles the issue.
 2. When e-mailing or faxing, address the lawmaker or the aide.
 3. Explain that you are from the lawmaker's district.
 4. Reference the issue and explain why it is important to PTA.
 5. Ask the lawmaker to vote in your favor.
- **Telephone Trees**
 1. Increases the number of contacts with policy makers.
 2. Allows a few lead callers to generate responses from a large number of PTA members.
 3. Make sure you have responsible lead callers.
 4. Keep the information brief.
- **Media**
 1. Cultivate relationships with media contacts (newspapers, radio, cable stations) and develop a trust level.
 2. Be concise, specific, and factual.
 3. Serve as an information resource who can be relied on to have the most up-to-date, factual information concerning the issue at hand.

Resources:

National PTA *Annual Resources for PTAs*

Our Children magazine

National PTA website (www.pta.org); Maryland PTA website (www.mdpta.org)

This Week in Washington

Resolutions and Position Statements of the National PTA, Maryland PTA, PTA Council of Frederick County, Inc.