

Legislative Handbook



2018-2019

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Welcome

Arkansas PTA promotes legislation designed to protect all children and youth. Legislation designed to meet the education, health and welfare needs of all children and youth.

We encourage involvement not only at the local school level, but also at the state and national levels as well. Decisions affecting our children are made beyond our own family unit and beyond the classroom walls. As parents and teachers, it is incumbent upon us to understand those decisions and, when appropriate, help influence those decision-makers to enact adequate laws in the best interest of all children. When PTA speaks for *every child with one voice*, decision-makers will listen. Arkansas PTA was represented at both our national and state capitols this year speaking to legislators as important decisions about your children's future were being decided.

This booklet includes information to help you be an advocate for Arkansas children. Should you need to contact a state legislator by email, you can link to them from the Arkansas Legislature's website www.arkleg.state.ar.us. The National PTA website, www.pta.org has excellent information on current issues before the U.S. Congress, as well as links to email your representatives.

In order for us to accurately represent the views of Arkansas PTA members, we need to hear from you. Arkansas PTA recommends that you elect or appoint a Legislative Chair on your local PTA board and make sure that person is signed up for the **PTA Takes Action** network to receive federal policy updates as well as **PTA Takes Action** alerts.

As Vice President of Legislation for Arkansas PTA, I want to assist you in keeping your PTA members informed about issues and pending legislation that will affect your children and their education. If I can be of service, please contact Arkansas PTA or you may email me at vpleg.arpta@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Amberly Knowlton-Hayes

Vice President of Legislation

Arkansas PTA

The Parent Teacher Association

Membership is open to anyone who believes in the mission and purposes of the Parent Teacher Association. Individual members may belong to any number of PTAs and pay dues in each. Every person who joins a local PTA automatically becomes a member of both the state and national PTAs. Together we are a powerful voice for children. With your help, we can continue to work toward PTA's goal of a quality education and nurturing environment for every child.

PTA Vision

Making every child's potential is a reality.

PTA Mission

To make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

PTA Values

- **Collaboration:** We work in partnership with a wide array of individuals and organizations to accomplish our agreed-upon goals.
- **Commitment:** We are dedicated to promoting children's health, well-being, and educational success through strong parent, family, and community involvement.
- **Accountability:** We acknowledge our obligations. We deliver on our promises.
- **Respect:** We value our colleagues and ourselves. We expect the same high quality of effort and thought from ourselves as we do from others.
- **Inclusivity:** We invite the stranger and welcome the newcomer. We value and seek input from as wide a spectrum of viewpoints and experiences as possible.
- **Integrity:** We act consistently with our beliefs. When we err, we acknowledge the mistake and seek to make amends.

PTA Purposes: Historical Goals of PTA

- To promote the welfare of the children and youth in home, school, community and place of worship.
- To raise the standards of home life.
- To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth.
- To bring a closer relation between the home and school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth.

- To develop a united effort between educators and the general public to secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, social and spiritual education.

Arkansas PTA Legislative Program for 2017-2018

Arkansas PTA supports quality education for all children

WE SUPPORT MEASURES THAT PROVIDE FOR:

1. Expanded funding for public schools
 - a. Adequate and equitable system of public education that would provide every child and every community with quality opportunities for their future
 - b. Adequate salary for teachers and support staff (certified and noncertified)
 - c. Increased state funding where federal funds have been reduced
 - d. Instructional technology and classroom learning materials
 - e. Support adequate funding for the education of all children
2. Children's health and safety
 - a. Community health education
 - b. Safe, nurturing and hazard free environment
 - c. Drug awareness and prevention
 - d. Playground safety
 - e. Comprehensive health care for all children and families
 - f. Support for positive internet education for parents and children
 - g. Continued work to ensure that tolerance and respect is extended to all children and families of diverse communities
 - h. Promotion of healthy lifestyles, including nutrition and physical activity
 - i. Protection of all children from bullying, including cyber bullying
3. A quality education for all children
 - a. Expansion and development of preschool and before/after school programs.
 - b. Cultural arts and physical education programs taught by individuals with appropriate certification, as part of the school curriculum
 - c. Support for school improvement efforts
 - d. Service to all children in the least restrictive environment
 - e. Student assessment and testing for the purpose of identifying how instruction can be improved and learning increased
 - f. Stronger family engagement provisions, adequate funding and modifications made to accountability in the *No Child Left Behind Act/Elementary and Secondary Education Act*
 - g. Strengthened Arkansas educational standards regardless of school setting

WE OPPOSE MEASURES THAT:

1. Weaken or minimize the power of local school boards
2. Put public money into private or parochial choice/voucher plans. Public dollars should be used to support public schools
3. Divert tax monies from school districts without the support of the affected district's board of education
4. Weaken collaboration between school, home and community

***IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE SUPPORT BENEFICIAL LEGISLATION,
BUT IT'S JUST AS IMPORTANT TO OPPOSE ANY THAT MAY HARM***

PTA Takes Action Network

The Arkansas PTA is continually updating its **PTA Takes Action** network. Within our state, PTA members will be assigned as special contacts to our state senators and representatives. These PTA members will be the direct link to the senators and representatives and will express PTA positions for laws affecting children and youth.

The PTA representatives to the member to member network have an extremely important job. The responsibilities of the PTA network members will be:

1. To understand and be familiar with PTA positions and programs;
2. To support and promote the PTA legislative program, understanding the representative is speaking for all the children of Arkansas;
3. To develop an ongoing relationship with the senator or representative through visits, letters, e-mails, and phone calls;
4. To be able to respond to bills that need quick attention by making contacts with lawmakers;
5. To attend the Arkansas PTA Legislative Day;
6. To keep members of the local PTA informed on issues and legislative goals;

The Arkansas PTA needs all local PTA units to participate in the Member to Member network. Please have your unit select someone to represent them on the Arkansas PTA Takes Action Committee. Then email or mail their information to me. The committee will communicate mostly through emails but may occasionally have conference calls.

Arkansas PTA
PO Box 1015
North Little Rock, AR 72115
e-mail: vpleg.arpta@gmail.com

PTA Takes Action Participation Form

(Please ask the members of your unit to select someone to represent them on the Arkansas PTA Takes Action Committee and submit the following information.)

“To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth”

- From the Purposes of the National PTA

PTA Advocacy

The act of mobilizing individuals to spark changes in programs and policies at the local, state, and national levels that benefit children is called “advocacy”. Advocacy is an integral part of the PTA mission. PTA is active in public policy issues in our nation’s capitol, as well as in our elementary, middle and high schools, our school boards, our city councils, our state legislatures and everywhere in between. The lives of children and their families are improved through the advocacy efforts of PTA members at each level of government. Sometimes PTA advocacy occurs in very visible groundbreaking ways, such as the passage of the federal School Lunch Program; and sometimes in very low-key, below the radar ways, such as participating in the selection of a new school principal. Each is important in the lives of our children and the mission of PTA.

Much of what your local PTA is doing to improve laws, policies, and conditions in your community fall under this category. Here are some examples of this at the local level.

- Talking to all parents about the importance of their participation in their children’s education.
- Sitting down with the school principal to discuss issues concerning parents and students.
- Monitoring the implementation of testing standards in your school.
- Participating in a school board hearing highlighting the need to purchase new textbooks or computers.
- Building a coalition of parents, school administrators, and community leaders to design meaningful after-school activities.
- Disseminating information about a school construction bond measure.
- Serving on the committee responsible for designing a wellness policy for your child’s school.

Many public policy changes begin at the local level where PTA members have the ability to influence and recruit parents, the community, and decision makers to influence the development and implementation of public policies. Parent involvement is an important element of advocacy.

Parents play a major advocacy role by being full partners in all decision-making affecting their children. Through this involvement, members become energized and engaged. With the skills they acquire through local advocacy activities, PTA members can work effectively with PTA state and national leaders to tackle larger efforts to improve the education and well being of all children.

Statewide efforts may include:

- Organizing petition drives or “get-out-the-vote” drives.

- Providing state PTA officials with local examples of problems and/or promising solutions to issues currently being debated by the state legislature.
- Coordinating local PTA members and community allies to oppose a statewide voucher initiative.
- Organizing or participating in a letter writing campaign to promote an equitable education funding system, oppose initiatives to impose a cap on taxes that would decrease necessary funding for education, or support public pre-k programs.
- Maintaining contact with the Arkansas PTA Vice President of Legislation and sharing information with other PTA members on local issues, problems and promising solutions.

On the national level, PTA efforts have led to positive changes in child labor laws, public health services, federal education laws, parent involvement policies, school lunch programs, juvenile justice protections and mandatory immunizations. All of these changes occurred because of the consistent hard work and persuasion of PTA members just like you.

Tips for Working with State and Federal Lawmakers

Working with state and federal legislators often requires special attention to detail and protocols. These policy makers are bombarded everyday with demands, request and “friendly” suggestions. They are dedicated to serving the needs of their constituents, but with so much information coming at them from so many different viewpoints; it is often difficult for them to focus specifically on the issues of concern to you. Review the helpful suggestions included in this booklet to increase your visibility and make the most of your contact with state and federal elected officials.

Contacting Decision-Makers by Telephone

When timing is critical, phone calls are an effective communications strategy for “one-on-one persuasion”. Phone calls also allow you to establish an ongoing, working relationship with the person or office you are targeting.

Telephone the decision-maker’s office and ask to speak with the aide in charge of the issue. Give the aide information about the bill or regulation and ask when action on the measure is expected. Explain that you are from their area, identify your local PTA unit, how many members you have and how many children you serve. Tell how you feel about the issue. Ask how the decision-maker will vote and urge them to follow the PTA position.

When calling larger offices, the person you may be conveying your opinions to will often be the receptionist or other staff. Although every office has its own system, all staff are generally trained to take down all the pertinent information and pass them on to the appropriate staff member.

Effective Lobbying by Phone

1. Understand that you may be speaking to an aide, not the legislator. Write down the name, since you will need it for follow-up conversations. The legislator's aides are the key people with whom you will be dealing most of the time.
2. Be clear on what you want from this phone call. You are calling simply to register your informed opinion on a pending issue. You are successful if the lawmaker's office understands that a concerned citizen has weighed in with a strongly held opinion.
3. Introduce yourself and give your address, **making clear you are a constituent**. If you have any special credentials, state them (just the fact that you're associated with a non-profit organization is a credential, but you may have other qualifications to support your opinion).
4. Say why you are calling: assuming you are calling about pending legislation, state the bill number and explain what the bill does (don't expect the lawmaker to have every bill memorized). Get right to the bottom line. You are calling to urge a yea or nay vote and asking them to support funding for nonprofit organizations.
5. Pause briefly for a reply but be prepared to continue without feedback (the legislator or aide is likely taking notes and may want to hear you out before commenting).

Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials

Writing to your elected official is a great way to communicate your position on the issues. The most effective form of communication is the handwritten postcard. Many legislators take notice that you took the time to hand write a postcard. And as an extra bonus, a postcard is easy to read! Form letters that are simply signed by the constituents are not recommended.

- Keep it brief. Letters should never be longer than one page and should be limited to one issue.
- State who you are and what you want up front. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly (ie: House bill: "H.R. _____", Senate bill: "S. _____").
- Be courteous, to the point, and include key information using examples to support your position.
- Personalize your letter. If you have one, include a personal story that shows how the issue affects you and your family.

Addressing Correspondence

To a U.S. Senator:

The Honorable (full name)
___ (Rm#) ___ (name of) Senate Office Bldg.
United States Senate

To a U.S. Representative:

The Honorable (full name)
___ (Rm#) ___ (name of) House Office Bldg
United States House of Representatives

Dear Senator:

Dear Representative:

NOTE: When addressing a letter to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as: Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman, or Dear Mr. Speaker.

Emailing Congress

Generally, the same guidelines apply as with writing letters to Congress. You may find and email your senators and representatives directly from the National PTA website www.pta.org.

Arkansas State Legislative Matters

A list of current members of the Arkansas General Assembly and their contact information follows this section for your convenience. You may also go to www.arkleg.state.ar.us to keep up with issues before the Arkansas legislature. On this website, you can find scheduled committee meetings, agendas for the meetings, texts of bills that have been introduced and email links to most legislators.

There are several other Arkansas organizations that also promote child advocacy issues and often have updates on their websites. These may be valuable to you in researching certain issues.

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

www.aradvocates.org

Arkansas School Boards Association

www.arsba.org

Arkansas Department of Education

<http://arkedu.state.ar.us>

Follow Up

It is important to express your views, but also to follow up on an elected official's vote or action. Send a thank you note or email if the vote or action was in your favor or a polite note expressing your disappointment if the official took action against your position.

Dos and Don'ts of Lobbying at a Glance

ACTION	DO	DON'T
Phone	• Offer to call back at a more convenient time. • Use your time well	• Talk more than 10 minutes • Talk at dinner
In Person	• Speak only briefly about your issue at an unrelated function • Offer to make an appointment • Remember—door-to-door not good for detailed discussions	• Think your issue is the only issue • Insult • Push when you don't have their undivided attention
Mail	• Send a letter • Send a postcard	• Send a form letter • Send a petition

Making Your Case

DO	DON'T
• Smile	• Threaten
• Be gracious	• Monopolize
• Relate it to you and others on a personal level	• Be impolite
• Appreciate their time	• Tell them they owe you the time
• Understand what time of year it is	• Be condescending

Drive Your Message Home

DO	DON'T
• Offer to get back. Follow up with a thank you	• Forget to follow up
• Give them a reason to get back to you	• Expect them to remember you and your issue without prompting
• Make a note to yourself about the date and discussion	• Expect too much or too little
• If there are no communications after three months, try again	

GOAL: BECOME AN INDISPENSABLE RESOURCE!

State Contacts

Governor

Governor Asa Hutchinson
State Capitol Room 250
500 Woodlane Ave.
Little Rock, AR 72201
Phone: (501) 682-2345
<http://governor.arkansas.gov/contact-info/>

Arkansas Department of Education

Johnny Key, Commissioner
Arkansas Department of Education
Four Capitol Mall, Room 304-A
Little Rock, AR 72201
Phone: 501-682-4203
Email: Johnny.Key@arkansas.gov

Resolutions

Resolutions call for action by the National PTA or the states, regions, councils, or local units of PTA. Resolutions seek to address problems, situations or concerns that affect children and youth nation- and state-wide and that require nation- or state-wide action for solutions.

Each year delegates at the Convention debate and vote on resolutions submitted by local units, councils, regions, and the state PTA. Resolutions adopted by the convention delegates must be considered by the Board of Managers, and only those approved by the membership constitute official positions of Arkansas PTA.

Existing resolutions may be reactivated by the convention body. A proposed resolution that presents a position similar to or in opposition to an existing resolution is presented to the convention as a substitute resolution. If the substitute resolution is adopted by the convention the existing resolution is then rescinded by the Board of Managers and the substitute becomes the position of Arkansas PTA.

What Form Does a Resolution Take?

A resolution consists of two main parts:

1. **Whereas** statements: These are the preamble part of the resolution made up of statements which set forth the problem/concern, show the reason for the resolution, give information on the situation, and show why it should be adopted. They “make the case.”
2. **Resolved** statements: These are the main motion. They state the action called for and express the opinion or will of the group.

Procedure for Submitting Resolutions

1. Resolutions must include the signature of the local unit or council president
2. Resolutions from Regions must include the signature of the Region Vice President.
3. **All resolutions must be received in the State PTA office by December 1.** (In the event that the 1st falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday, the resolutions will be accepted on the next business day. Resolutions received after the deadline will not be eligible for presentation at the state convention.) **Earlier submission is encouraged.**

What are the Other Requirements?

Each resolution submitted to Arkansas PTA is considered by the Resolutions Committee and must meet established criteria. (Electronic submissions are preferred by not required!)

1. To meet format criteria, each resolution must:

- Include a Table of Contents;
- Include a Reference Sheet which provides the page numbers and bibliographical information (author, publisher, date, etc.) of the substantiating evidence for each Whereas given in the documentation submitted as background material;
- Give background material references to substantiate each Whereas;
- **Enclose the specific references in the background material for each Whereas in brackets and be labeled as to the appropriate Whereas.** (This assists the committee in ensuring that sufficient evidence exists for each statement.)
- Include no more than 5 double-sided or 10 single-sided pages of background material (numbered consecutively and printed in type no smaller than 10 point/12 pitch.)

2. To meet substantive criteria, each resolution must:

- Relate to the education, health, safety, or welfare of children and youth
- Be in harmony with the Purposes and basic policies of the PTA;
- Concern a matter that is national or statewide in scope, be written with a national/state focus, and require nation- or state- wide action for solution;
- State a position not previously adopted by the PTA. (Copies of adopted positions are available for reference in the Resolutions books at state PTA offices or from state PTA presidents.)
- Be written in language appropriate for national/state consideration; (i.e. "Be it resolved that the National/State PTA shall...")
- Not cite Purposes of the PTA or positions in Whereas statements. (These are already established and assumed. Purposes or positions can be cited in a rationale statement.)
- Not use words like "seek" with respect to legislation in resolved statements because this language would require that National/State PTA actively seek to draft legislation and recruit a sponsor, which takes more (human) resources than National/State PTA has available.

3. **Provide three background references from accurate sources for each *Whereas*.**

Material must be from a variety of sources (with source—Arkansas Department of Health, State Police, Children’s Hospital, UAMS, Department of Education, Arkansas Advocates, The Center for Children and Families, including author, publisher, date, etc.—clearly identified) and current (no more than 5 years old.)

- **DO NOT** use PTA materials as documentation. (A variety of independent sources is required as proof for establishing a new position.)
- Include sufficient evidence to give a person with no knowledge of the subject enough information to make an intelligent decision.

What is Background Material?

(Standards of evidence)

- Background material must substantiate each *Whereas* and *Resolved* clause of the resolution and should indicate that the subject of the resolution was well researched by the submitting group.
- Background material must be national/state not local, in scope.
- Background material must include a variety of sources. If only a few documents are used, there is a danger that only one person’s or one organization’s opinion is being reflected and that a comprehensive view is not presented.
- Background material must be factual. It can include, but is not limited to, information such as educational, safety, and welfare articles and updates; copies of documented research; copies of pertinent laws; government publications and regulations, and copies of articles from professional publications (the kind which are generally screened by multiple expert editors).
- Newspaper articles, abstracts, and editorials alone are not sufficient background material as they are second-hand sources and often statements of opinion. Avoid using materials from other organizations intended for lobbying as these items may present a biased view and often do not cite their sources.
- Material retrieved from the Internet must meet the same standards as to identification of source and type of documentation as is required for printed information. While substantive research information is available from the Internet, there is also much biased and unsubstantiated material. Good judgment should be used in selecting material.
- PTA materials are not acceptable documentation, since this is “circular” information; it says, in effect, “PTA believes this is true because PTA says so.” Independent sources are required as evidence.
- Personal letters, lecture notes, logs of phone calls, e-mail printouts, and similar private and personal sources **are not** acceptable documentation because they cannot be verified.

Where to Call with Questions about Resolutions?

The Resolutions Committee wants constituent bodies to be successful in submitting resolutions for consideration. They are happy to answer questions and provide advice on the preparation of resolutions. Be sure to ask questions in time to react to the answers before the deadline for submitting resolutions.

Emergency Resolutions

Emergency resolutions may be submitted only if the urgency of the subject matter has arisen after the established deadline. They must conform to all established criteria, be approved by the Resolutions Committee, and be approved for consideration by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the delegates in order to be eligible for consideration. If an emergency resolution is approved by the Resolutions Committee, the submitting group must provide enough copies for the entire convention body and must deliver them to the State PTA convention office by 8:00 a.m. the opening day of convention.

After a Resolution is Submitted

The Resolutions Committee considers all resolutions submitted by the deadline and prepares those approved for submission to the convention. The committee rejects all those which do not meet established criteria. The committee may: combine two or more resolutions of the same intent; edit or adapt resolutions to make them appropriate for convention action; or make substantive changes (with the consent of the submitting group).