2026-2027 Advocacy Chair Toolkit

For PTA Advocacy Chairs in Austin ISD

Prepared by Austin Council of PTAs

austincouncilpta.org

Congratulations on your role as Advocacy Chair for your school's PTA!

Texas PTA is the second-largest child advocacy association in the nation and the largest in Texas. The advocacy chair position is essential to the makeup of PTA. Thank you for stepping up to represent your community's voice!

Advocacy simply means "the act of speaking on behalf of, or in support of, another person, place, or thing." As advocacy chair, you will advance the mission of PTA by advocating for important issues at the local, state, and national level.

An effective advocacy chair is engaged in their community. They are informed on the legislative priorities of their local council of PTAs and Texas PTA, and they can clearly communicate those priorities to help others understand the current challenges facing public education. Advocacy chairs also provide members with ways to engage elected officials and take action themselves.

Advocacy chairs listen to the parents and families in their local school community to identify issues that are important to them, and engage with them to find solutions.

Advocacy chairs are an important link in the communication chain of PTA. A key function of the advocacy chair is to identify important advocacy issues and actions and to share information with their local community on a regular basis.

An effective advocacy chair understands that everyone has a different level of understanding of public education issues, as well as varying levels of interest and time to devote to advocacy work. Advocacy chairs should strive to help community members understand how public education issues affect every one of us and inspire them to take some action, however small.

Serving as Advocacy Chair for your PTA is a great way to learn how the legislative process works, become more informed about important issues, share knowledge and encourage action, and connect with people in your community who share common goals.

As Advocacy Chair, you don't have to be an expert on government, public education, or AISD. You just need to care about schools and be enthusiastic about telling others why they should care, too!

Contents

First Steps to Complete as Advocacy Chair 3

PTA Basics: Texas PTA vs. Austin Council of PTAs 4

Key Duties of the Advocacy Chair Role 5

Advocating as a PTA: Dos and Don'ts 7

Advocacy Communication Tips 8

Texas Legislature Basics 10

Texas Education Agency (TEA) and State Board of Education (SBOE) Basics 12

Texas PTA Rally Day 14

Effective Advocacy at All Levels 16

Advocating at the State Level 18

Examples of Advocacy at Every Level 21

Resources 23

Appendix 1: How to Submit a Public Comment on a House Bill 25

Appendix 2: How to Register ("Drop a Card") For or Against a Bill 27

Appendix 3: How to Testify at the Texas Legislature 31

Appendix 4: How to Speak at a School Board Meeting 35

Appendix 5: Sample Plans of Work for Advocacy Chairs 37

First Steps to Complete as Advocacy Chair

1. **Register as a PTA leader with Texas PTA here.**

2. **Join your PTA!** All executive board members must become PTA members at least 30 days before the start of the membership year they will serve in, or at least 30 days after their election or appointment if they were elected or appointed after the start of the membership year.

3. **Complete required PTA trainings.** Every executive board member must complete two required trainings—FOUNDATIONS Essentials and FOUNDATIONS Basics—within 30 days of their election or appointment. Access the trainings here.

4. **Meet with your predecessor to complete a transition meeting.** Be sure to get their previous plans of work and gain access to any other materials from their term, especially any digital drives or folders. This is a great time to get many of your questions answered, big and small!

5. **Create a plan of work to be submitted and approved by the executive board.** The plan of work will include your priorities for the year and any budget expenses. See page 36 for sample plans of work for Advocacy Chairs. Texas PTA also has a sample plan of work here.

6. **Update your calendar with all membership and executive board meeting dates.** If you also serve as the Austin Council of PTAs (ACPTA) delegate for your PTA, membership meetings are listed here.

    - At many schools, the PTA Advocacy Chair is also the ACPTA delegate, but at some schools they are two separate positions. Be sure to confirm with your PTA president if you are the ACPTA delegate.

7. **Update your calendar with all upcoming election dates and related deadlines.**

8. **Subscribe to newsletters and groups to stay informed:**

    - Austin Council of PTAs Communique
    - Austin Council of PTAs Google group
    - Austin Council of PTAs Advocacy Resource Folder
    - See “Resources” on page 23 to find more organizations to follow.

PTA Basics: Texas PTA vs. Austin Council of PTAs

What is Texas PTA?

The mission of Texas PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. Texas PTA provides resources and training for local PTAs, including programs and events to educate PTA leaders and help them make a real difference in their local schools.

As is evident in the mission, advocacy is a huge priority for Texas PTA. As early as 1909, one of the organizations that would later become Texas PTA advocated for free textbooks, teacher retirement funds, improved school facilities, sanitary drinking cups, and kindergarten.

Texas PTA has had a significant presence at the state Capitol since the 1920s, and in 1976 they hosted the first "PTA Day at the Capitol," where PTA members pushed for public education funding to be the highest priority for legislators, as well as for lowering student-to-teacher ratios and parent education programs.

In 2011, PTA Day at the Capitol became Texas PTA Rally Day, an event held when the Texas Legislature is in session (in odd-numbered years). PTA members from all over the state gather to attend informative causes, rally in support of legislative priorities, and meet with their representatives.

For more information on Rally Day, see page 14.

What is the Austin Council of PTAs?

Austin Council of PTAs (ACPTA) includes all Austin ISD PTAs. ACPTA works in partnership with Texas PTA and National PTA to support the mission of making every child's potential a reality.

ACPTA has an executive board elected by delegates from AISD PTAs. The executive board works to fulfill the duties of ACPTA which include strengthening local PTAs, developing leadership potential, promoting PTA membership, and advancing the goals, programs, and initiatives of National and Texas PTAs.

ACPTA holds delegate meetings and provides training, workshops, and board orientations for PTA leaders. They work to engage with and support PTAs from all over the district so that every community can have a voice in AISD. They also meet regularly with the district to share input from a PTA perspective on district policies, programs, and communications.

It is also ACPTA's responsibility to share calls to action from Texas PTA. As Advocacy Chair, your role includes communicating those calls to action with your school using whatever communication tools you can, such as email, social media, and in-person meetings.

Key Duties of the Advocacy Chair Role

If you haven't completed the first steps on page 3, go back and do those first!

LEARN + CONNECT

- Learn the basics of the Texas Legislature (see page 10).
- Read about "Who Does What?" in the Texas government.
- Brush up on the basics of public education funding in Texas with these resources:
  - Public Education Funding in Texas: How it Works and Where We Are
  - School Finance 101 videos from Raise Your Hand Texas
  - School Vouchers 101
- Read the legislative priorities of Texas PTA.
- Stay on top of relevant policy issues through local and state media outlets, ACPTA newsletter and Google group, AISD communications, and school board meetings.
- Connect with other PTA Advocacy Chairs to discuss common goals and strategies.

EDUCATE

- Educate your community on the basics of the Texas legislature and public education funding. Make sure members know who their representatives are.
- When possible, generate awareness of how state and district-wide issues affect your local school community.
- Invite experts to speak at PTA meetings to educate members on important topics. Reach out to ACPTA for help!
  - For example, you could invite someone from Raise Your Hand Texas to talk about public school funding, or someone from Our Schools Our Democracy to discuss charter schools.
  - You can also invite your school board trustee, city council representative, state representative, or senator to speak on current policies and ways to advocate.

SHARE

- Share important advocacy information and calls to action in all available communication outlets.
- Keep members informed regarding upcoming elections (school board, bond, local, and state).
- Make it a goal to include an advocacy update in every PTA newsletter and at every meeting.

ACTIVATE + ENGAGE

- Listen to your community to identify what issues are important to them.
- Identity and encourage potential advocates.
  - Create an email list of PTA members who are interested in diving deeper into advocacy work and share information with them.
  - If possible, form an Advocacy Committee to help expand your efforts.

SHARE cont.

- You can also send a specific advocacy newsletter for longer updates, and post and share updates on PTA-run social media accounts.

ACTIVE + ENGAGE cont.

- Promote and participate in Texas PTA's Rally Day, which happens in February in odd-numbered years. Explore budget avenues to allow a large group, including students, to attend.
    - For more information on Rally Day, see page 14.

ELEVATE - take it a step further when you're ready!

- Consider volunteering for your Campus Advisory Council or applying for a position on an AISD advisory body.
- Consider attending school board meetings or tune in virtually to keep up with district issues and decisions. More information on AISD board meetings is here.
- Meet with elected officials at least annually, ideally before the start of and in between legislative sessions.
- Host a candidate or issue forum. Texas PTA has resources on hosting a forum.
- Develop a candidate questionnaire for an upcoming election and publicize the candidates' responses.
- Become a Volunteer Deputy Registrar and have voter registration forms available at all PTA meetings.

Advocating as a PTA: Dos and Don'ts

Advocating as a PTA organization is different than advocating as an individual. When you advocate for yourself or your children, you do so independently, separate from PTA. You should avoid using your PTA position to exert influence in these cases.

However, when you advocate on behalf of your PTA as Advocacy Chair, you are representing your PTA's collective voice. If your PTA wants to take a position on an issue that affects the entire school community, your organization must draft a resolution and take a vote. Advocacy efforts must align with your PTA's mission and represent the membership's interests.

You are allowed to and encouraged to advocate for policies aligned with Texas PTA's legislative priorities.

You should also advocate for ACPTA legislative priorities once they are voted on and approved by a majority of local PTAs.

In PTA, we remain nonpartisan and have no affiliation with any political party or candidate. You can educate your members on important topics and keep them informed of changing legislation and policies, but in order to take a specific position on an issue it must be approved by the organization. You also may not participate in any political campaign.

As a PTA, DO..	**As a PTA, DO NOT..**
• Take positions on education and child advocacy issues, including initiatives and referendums at the local or state level. • Share information on PTA social media accounts and PTA newsletters about advocacy issues and nonpartisan events. • Organize and support activities that educate members about advocacy topics. • Speak to legislators and public policymakers regarding issues. • Encourage civic participation by promoting voter registration and turnout. • Identify and address issues affecting your campus or community with school, district, and other local officials. • Arrange, sponsor, and advertise public information forums. • Share the voting records of elected officials.	• Act on an issue without the vote and approval of your membership. • Use a district email server or service paid for with AISD funds to send advocacy information. • Participate in or intervene in any political campaign, directly or indirectly, on behalf of or against a candidate for public office. This includes both partisan and nonpartisan races, such as the school board elections. *Note: Any PTA member expressing support for or opposition to a candidate or political party must do so independently of their PTA affiliation.*

Advocacy Communication Tips

As Advocacy Chair, you will discover that there is a massive amount of information to find and consume about public education and child advocacy. Between newsletters, social media accounts, videos, articles, webinars, and other events, it's easy to get overwhelmed.

Remember: you don't have to know everything or be an expert! Your main role is to identify priorities of your PTA and share information from Texas PTA and ACPTA with your local community. By serving as that critical communication link, you are part of a network that is getting the word out to as many people as possible about issues that affect our children. Advocacy is a group effort, and you are a huge part of that effort!

It can be challenging to effectively simplify and communicate all of this information to your PTA members. Especially since they may be already overwhelmed trying to keep up with work, administrative tasks, and other current events. They may also feel as though they don't have time to contribute to advocacy.

Here are some tips for communicating to your PTA as Advocacy Chair:

1. **Simplify as much as possible.** For the most part, your members only need to know the basics of an issue: what is going on, potential consequences, and what action they can take. Don't dive too deep into the history or backstory and don't include too many numbers, dates, or names unless they are vital to understanding the issue.

2. **Emphasize how this issue affects your school.** Again, when people are feeling overwhelmed, it can be hard for them to listen or take action if they don't think that an issue will affect them personally. Explain that even if an issue doesn't affect your school directly, our school district and our public education system can only thrive if we are all thriving. Advocating for everyone's children, which is the mission of PTA, is a way to advocate for your own children.

3. **Minimize the amount of links and outside sources.** If you are sending an email, all of the important content should be contained in the email. Members should not have to click on a link to gain any critical information. You can include a link or two for those who have the time and desire to learn more, but most people will only read what's in the email, so make sure it contains all of your key points.

4. **Calls to action should be easy to execute without additional research or effort.** It should tell people exactly what to say, who to contact, what to expect, etc. Whenever possible, include a call script or a sample text. For someone who has never taken action before, providing all the necessary details removes many of the barriers and can help them take that first step.

Once someone takes that initial action, they may feel empowered to do more! But everyone has to start somewhere.

5. **Include the most important and urgent advocacy information in your general PTA newsletter whenever possible.** This will help get the most eyes on it, but it needs to be brief and to-the-point. If there is a lot more to say that won't fit in a blurb in the general newsletter, you could send a separate, advocacy-focused newsletter for those who wish to take the time to read it.

   You can also create a list of folks who want to dive deeper into advocacy work and send updates to them with more in-depth information like articles, podcasts, events, volunteer opportunities, opportunities to testify at hearings, etc.

Texas Legislature Basics

To be an effective advocate, it's important to know the basics of the Texas Legislature. When you know how it is structured, who the leaders are, how bills move through committees, and when sessions occur, you'll be better able to participate in the process and understand how legislation affects children and public education.

Composition of the Texas Legislature

- Composed of 150 representatives elected every two years and 31 senators, half of whom are elected every two years for a four-year term.
- The election occurs on the first Tuesday in November of even-numbered years.
- The districts from which the representatives and senators are elected are determined every ten years based on the population census.
- The district boundaries are established so that approximately the same number of people is in each district, in line with the one-person, one-vote principle.

Leadership and Committees

- The Lieutenant Governor is the presiding officer of the Senate and may vote only to break a tie.
- The Speaker of the House, elected by the House, presides over the House of Representatives, maintains order during floor debate, and may vote on all questions.
- The chairs of the House and Senate committees and subcommittees also hold power in the legislature. They decide if bills assigned to their committees will move forward in the process.
    - In PTA, the two main committees we follow are the Senate Education Committee and the House of Representatives Public Education Committee.

Texas Legislative Process

Regular Session

- Regular sessions of the Texas Legislature begin on the second Tuesday of odd-numbered years and are limited to 140 calendar days.

Special Session

- Only the Governor may call a Special Session, which is limited to 30 days.
- The only subjects that may be considered during the Special Session of the Legislature are those that the Governor proposes.

How Bills Become Law

- Bills are written and sponsored by legislators. Legislators can start filing bills on the first Monday after the November general election before the start of the legislative session. They can continue filing bills during the first 60 calendar days of the session.
- Next, a bill must be referred to a committee in the chamber where it was introduced. The committee chair decides which bills to consider when the committee meets.
- If a committee takes up a bill, they hold a public hearing where people can testify on the bill.
- The committee can then choose to advance the bill to the rest of the chamber or not take action on it. Many bills die in committee.
- If the bill makes it out of committee, it moves to the chamber it originated in, where there is a full chamber debate and public hearing.
- After debate on a bill, the majority of lawmakers in a chamber has to approve the bill twice in order for it to pass. If it passes in the chamber it originated in, it advances to the other chamber, where it goes through the same process.
- Both chambers must agree on any changes they made to the legislation.
- Once the bill passes in both the House and Senate and all changes are agreed on, the bill can be sent to the governor to be signed into law.

Note: Legislators must meet certain deadlines in order for a bill to move forward in the process, so they may try to kill a bill by drawing out various parts of the process long enough to miss a deadline.

How to Find Your Representatives

PTA members can find their state representatives via the "Who Represents Me?" tool.

Your federal representatives can be found here.

Texas Education Agency (TEA) and State Board of Education (SBOE) Basics

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is the state agency that oversees primary and secondary education. It is headed by the commissioner of education, who is appointed by the governor. Some of their responsibilities include administering the distribution of state and federal funding, administering the statewide assessment program and accountability system, and providing support to the State Board of Education (SBOE) in the development of the statewide curriculum.

Their stated mission is to “improve outcomes for all public school students in the state by providing leadership, guidance, and support to school systems.”

The SBOE is composed of 15 elected members with each member representing more than a million Texans. Just one SBOE member has more constituents than any other elected official in Texas. They work with the TEA and commissioner of education to facilitate the operation of the Texas public school system.

The SBOE’s duties include:

- Overseeing the investment of the Permanent School Fund which help funds public schools;
- Mandating what Texas students are taught and what classroom teachers must teach through the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills;
- Selecting textbooks and instructional materials from which Texas school districts chose;
- Approving the creation or revocation of open-enrollment charter schools;
- Adopting rules governing teacher and administrator certification and ethics as proposed by the State Board for Educator Certification; and
- Setting goals for the Texas public school system and adopting four-year plans for meeting those goals.

Who is my SBOE representative?

You can find out who your SBOE representative is here.

How is the SBOE different from my local school board?

Your local school board focuses on a single district, including managing the district's budget and appointing the superintendent, but the SBOE makes decisions for the entire state. The SBOE creates standards and policies that local school boards must implement.

The SBOE's influence even reaches beyond Texas. Since we're such a big state, we have one of the largest markets for textbooks. And because of that, major national publishers will create textbooks based on Texas's standards and revisions to curriculum. Other states will then purchase those textbooks, which means students in those states are learning the same curriculum as Texas students.

How can I advocate at the SBOE level?

You can testify at an SBOE public hearing or submit a public comment on a proposed rule.

Information on registering to testify is available here.

The process is similar to testifying at the Texas Legislature, except you can usually register to testify a few days in advance. You must be present at the hearing when they call your name and you have two minutes to speak.

If there are proposed rules with open comment periods, they will be listed here.

Texas PTA Rally Day

What is Rally Day?

Texas PTA Rally Day is an event held when the Texas Legislature is in session (in odd-numbered years). PTA members from all over the state gather to support the Texas PTA legislative priorities.

What happens at Rally Day?

Rally Day consists of three parts: first, you will attend informative causes; then, rally on the steps of the Capitol in support of legislative priorities; and finally, you will meet with your representatives.

How do I prepare for Rally Day as Advocacy Chair?

As Advocacy Chair, your role is to recruit PTA members and students to attend Rally Day and coordinate participation for your community. Here are tips to help you prepare:

- Get details from Texas PTA on Rally Day here. (Information is posted a few months before the event, which is held in February during legislative sessions.)
    - Texas PTA will host webinars to help you plan for Rally Day, learn about legislative priorities, and set up meetings with your state legislators.
- ACPTA will also widely share information about Rally Day in the weeks and months leading up to the event.
    - ACPTA will provide materials to help you promote Rally Day to your community and host educational opportunities leading up to the event.
    - ACPTA will be on site at Rally Day to help AISD PTAs navigate the event and find their way to various locations at the Capitol.
    - ACPTA often coordinates a lunch option if you wish to participate with your PTA.
    - ACPTA also sets up meetings with Austin legislators that AISD PTAs can attend as a group.
- Recruit both PTA members and students to attend Rally Day. If students are attending, talk to your principal to see if there are educational opportunities that can be provided to students before the event.

    - This could include civics presentations, guest speakers, writing assignments, group projects on the legislative process, postcard writing, or sign-making.

    - Rally Day can be considered a field trip so it will not count as an absence for students.

- Once you know how many people will be attending from your school, reserve buses and coordinate lunches. Work with your PTA board to determine your budget for the event.

- Educate PTA members on Texas PTA and ACPTA legislative priorities prior to Rally Day.

- On Rally Day, document your experience! Share photos and videos from the day on PTA social media accounts. (If students are attending, make sure you have permission to post their photo). Send a recap and photo to be included in your general PTA newsletter. Host a debrief meeting with students and parents about what they learned and what they would change for the next Rally Day.

Effective Advocacy at All Levels

There are so many issues at all different levels to advocate for. Too many, in fact, for one PTA to address, which means you'll have to determine where you want to focus your efforts. Once you decide on an issue to advocate for, here is a general step-by-step guide to effective advocacy at all levels:

1. **Select an issue.** Determine if the issue fits within the PTA's mission and how it affects your community. Ask if the issue can be understandable to those within and outside of PTA. In order to continue, membership has to vote and agree in order to advocate on an issue.

2. **Research the issue.** Find as many sources about the issue as possible and learn all sides. Read news from reputable sources. Ask questions and talk to people who are affected by it. Consult with other advocacy organizations to find out their views and actions they are taking.

3. **Organize for action.**

    - Organize your PTA members and reach out to other community groups.

    - Set short- and long-term goals.

    - Determine which people have power to affect the outcome of the issue (school boards, legislators, voters, organizations).

    - Come up with tactics that will help accomplish your goals and involve people in a variety of activities and events.

4. **Come up with an action plan.**

    - Design a strong, easy-to-understand message.

    - Survey members about how they feel about an issue.

    - Use newsletters and membership meetings to get out the message. Bring speakers who are experts on the issue to talk to your members.

    - Work with other community groups and organizations to form a coalition and extend the reach of your message.

5. **Share your message widely.**

- Use your PTA newsletter to inform members and get them involved.
- Use PTA social media outlets.
- You can also spread information to a wider audience through a letter to the editor or by contacting a local reporter and seeing if they can write an article.

Advocating at the State Level

Our state government holds a lot of power to enact laws, policies, and curriculum that affect our children. You can advocate in small or big ways to improve these laws, tell state leaders how policies affect your community, and mobilize others to take action as well.

Ways to advocate at the state level

- Call your state representatives and speak to a staffer or leave a message.
- Write a postcard.
- Post to social media and tag your legislator.
- Write a letter to the editor about a state law or policy.
- Share calls to action and other advocacy opportunities with those in your network, including those who live in other areas of Texas outside of Austin.
- Submit a public comment on a proposed bill. (See Appendix 1 on page 25 for more information.)
- Testify in person at a public hearing. (See Appendix 3 on page 31 for more information.)

How do I contact my elected officials?

- You can call or email your representatives, but calling is more effective. When you call, you will speak to a staffer in your representative's office.
- Write down what you want to say beforehand and keep it brief. Only discuss one bill or issue.
- Introduce yourself, say you are a constituent and state your zip code, and then give a brief statement on the bill or issue of concern.
    - Note: If you are emailing or leaving a voicemail, include your full address.
- When possible, personalize your statement with how the bill/issue is important to you and your community.
- The staffer will most likely say, "Thank you, I'll pass this along to the representative." You do not need to engage in a conversation on the issue with the staffer.

- Sample call script: “Hi, my name is Jean Jones and I’m a constituent in zip code 78704. I’m calling to urge the representative not to pass HB3 out of committee. I, along with the majority of Texans, do not want school vouchers. Vouchers give power to private schools, not parents, and drain critical resources from public schools. Thank you for your time.”

Meeting with elected officials

The legislature only meets for five months during odd-numbered years; the other 19 months is called the interim. The interim is the best time to meet with state legislators, but you can contact them at any time.

You can also invite your legislator to speak at your PTA meeting about legislative priorities and your community’s issues.

To schedule a legislative office visit, call your representative’s office and ask for their scheduler. Explain the purpose of your visit and that you are a constituent and a PTA member.

On the day of the meeting:

- You may meet with the legislator or a staffer. Staffers are very knowledgeable of issues and legislation, sometimes even more so than the legislators. They can have a major influence on the legislator’s priorities and the way they vote.
- Introduce yourself and anyone else in your group and identify yourself as constituents. Be courteous, avoid arguments, and make it a goal to establish a relationship with the person. Can you connect over their hometown or their favorite queso? Are there values you both share? Thank them for their service to Texas and for any past support of public education or child advocacy issues.
- Stick to your agenda, and bring notes and any relevant documents you want to share. Remember that if you are meeting on behalf of your PTA, you are representing the organization and must state PTA positions only, but you can still share your personal experience of how an issue has affected your child/school/community.
- If they are in agreement with any positions, ask what actions your PTA can take to help support them.
- Thank them at the end of the meeting and follow up after the meeting with a quick call or email to everyone you met with.
- After the visit, you can post photos on social media (tag your legislator) and share them in your PTA newsletter.

Examples of Advocacy at Every Level

Local Campus

- Advocating through programs, such as bringing arts in education events to your campus, sustainability programs, and healthy lifestyles policies and programs
- Recommending changes to homework/grading policies
- Pushing for use of best practices on standardized testing days
- Posting on your PTA or personal social media about what makes your campus special and what you love about public schools
- Bringing civics education opportunities to your campus
- Encouraging voter registration and turnout
- Organizing workshops and information sessions for caregivers
- Coordinating with Diversity Chairs on inclusion efforts and events
- Joining your Campus Advisory Council
- Meeting with the principal to discuss areas where the Advocacy Chair can help

School District / City

- Educating members and organizing around school closures/consolidations and boundary changes
- Speaking out on how various budget cuts would affect your community
- Advocating for policies around classroom screen time and technology use
- Pushing for changes to grading/GPA policies
- Passing a resolution to be able to advocate on ballot measures (e.g. Proposition A in 2024)
- Monitoring the implementation of state legislation at the district level (e.g. Texas law requires secure gun storage information to be sent out three times a year, but is the district doing that adequately?)

- Joining an AISD advisory body
- Attending school board meetings and giving public comment
- Attending ACPTA meetings and other ACPTA advocacy opportunities
- Donating to the Austin Ed Fund or ACPTA mini-grants (you can donate as an individual or your PTA can donate)
- Hosting a forum for school board candidates or collecting interview responses
- Writing a letter to the editor for a local publication

State

- Calling or emailing legislators (you can call your legislator on speakerphone during a PTA meeting so members can see how easy it is!)
- Inviting legislators to your school or meet with them in their office
- Registering for or against a bill (known as “dropping a card”, see Appendix 2 on page 27 for more information)
- Testifying in person at a state legislature public hearing or a State Board of Education meeting
- Helping someone write public testimony
- Providing transportation for or hosting someone at your house who lives in another city so they can testify at the Capitol
- Becoming a Volunteer Deputy Registrar and helping people in your community register to vote
- Attending Rally Day and recruiting members and students to attend
- Advocating for Texas PTA and ACPTA legislative priorities, e.g. school funding, standardized testing and accountability rates, and teacher retention

Resources

Organizations

Texas Public Education full org list

Raise Your Hand Texas

Texas Freedom Network

Our Schools, Our Democracy

Austin Council of PTAs

Texas PTA

ATX116

Texas AFT

Education Austin

Every Texan

Teach the Vote (candidate voting records)

Keep Austin Schools Independent

Public Education Resources

Public School Funding in Texas: How It Works and Where We Are

School Vouchers 101

Inside a TEA Takeover

Raise Your Hand Texas: School Finance Videos

Texas Center for Voucher Transparency: Voucher Program Fact Sheet

Every Texan report on recapture

Education X Podcast: Apple / Spotify

Advocacy Chair Resources

Texas PTA Advocacy Chair Overview

Texas PTA Advocacy Resource Guide

ACPTA Google Group

ACPTA Advocacy Resources Google Drive

Sample Advocacy Plans of Work

Letters to the Editor

Sample Advocacy Newsletters

Rally Day Prep for Elementary Schools

Texas Legislature Resources

Who Represents Me?

Who Does What at Local, State, Federal Levels

Who Does What in Education

Key Legislation Passed in 2025

How to Submit a Public Comment

How to Drop a Card at the Capitol

How to Testify at the Capitol

Video: House Witness Registration Process

House Public Education Committee Members

Senate Education Committee Members

Legislative Process for House and Senate Bills

How to Follow a Bill Using Texas Legislature Online

Capitol Visitors Guide and Maps

Austin ISD Resources

How to Speak at an AISD Board Meeting

AISD School Board Members

AISD Advisory Bodies

AISD Volunteer Opportunities

AISD Board Meetings Calendar/Agendas

Media Outlets

Austin American-Statesman

Texas Tribune

Texas Monthly

Community Impact

Courier Texas

The Daily Texan

KUT

Social Media

ACPTA Instagram

ACPTA Facebook

Voting Information

League of Women Voters Texas

Vote 411

Travis County Elections

Volunteer Deputy Registrars

Newsletters

ACPTA Communique

Texas PTA Under the Dome (sent directly to sent directly to registered Advocacy & Legislative PTA Leaders)

Texas Freedom Network

Our Schools Our Democracy

Courier TexEd Report

Texas AFT Education NewsFeed

Appendix 1: How to Submit a Public Comment on a House Bill

In the Texas Legislature, bills are first assigned to a committee in the House of Representatives or the Senate, depending on who introduced the bill. The legislature accepts public comments on bills that are in a House committee. If a bill is in a Senate committee, you cannot submit a public comment.

While the bill is still in a House committee, you can testify in person about the bill. However, if you can't make it to the Capitol in person, submitting a public comment online is a great way to voice your opinion on a bill. The public comment portal opens when the committee schedules a public hearing, and it closes when the hearing concludes.

Here are the steps to submit a public comment on a bill:

1. Go to the House Public Comment website.

2. Check the "Acknowledgement and affirmation" box and start filling out your contact information.

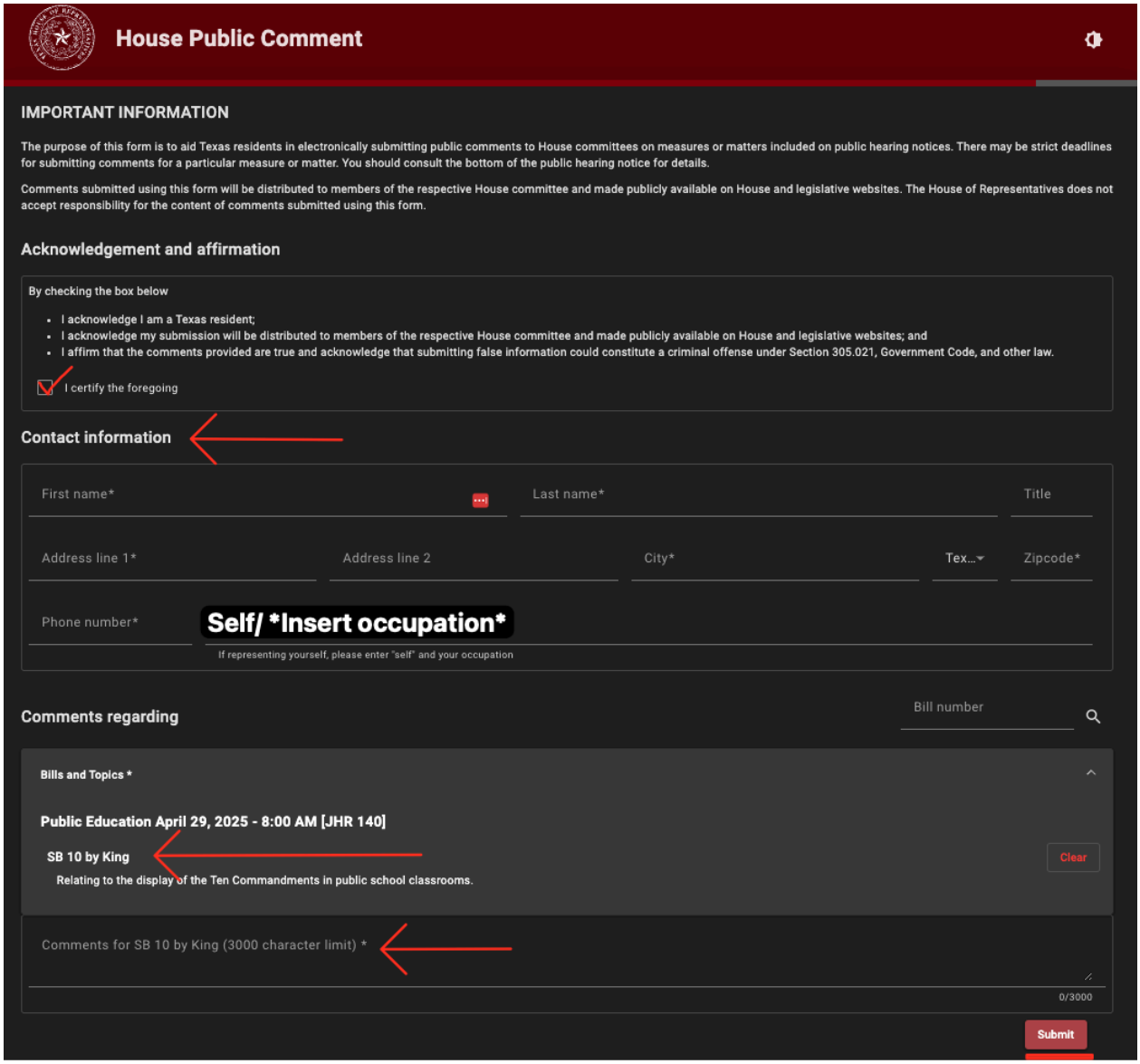
    - For the "Organization / Representing" section: Register as "Self" unless you have official permission to represent an organization, and list your occupation. **Do not register as a PTA member**, as your comments are your own and do not represent those of your entire PTA.

3. In the "Comments Regarding" section, you will click "Bills and Topics" to open the drop-down menu. Select the bill you want to comment on. There is also a search box where you can type in the bill number to select it more quickly.

    a. Remember, only bills that are in committee will be listed. Comments are accepted until the public committee hearing on the bill is adjourned.

4. Enter your comments in the blank field (3000 character limit).

5. Finally, select "Submit" and you're done!



Tips for Writing Comments

1. Start by introducing yourself, what district or city you are from, and your role (parent, student, teacher, etc.).
2. Clearly state whether you are for or against the bill.
3. Make it personal. Explain why you are taking the time to comment. Why does this matter to you and how the bill would affect your family and community? Give personal anecdotes if you can.
4. Ask for action. Tell the committee if you want them to vote for or against the bill, and give a brief recap of why.
5. Thank the committee for their time and service.

Appendix 2: How to Register (“Drop a Card”) For or Against a Bill

What is “dropping a card?”

Dropping a card means you are officially registering your stance (“for” or “against”) on a bill that is in committee.

Why should I drop a card?

If you aren’t able to attend a hearing or cannot wait to be called to testify at a hearing, registering is another way to make your voice heard. Your stance is submitted to the official bill record, which stays with the bill as it moves through the legislative process. Legislators may take this record into consideration when they vote.

How do I drop a card?

You must be on Capitol grounds to drop a card. You can enter the building and use a kiosk, or you can use your own laptop as long as it is connected to the free Capitol wifi.

If you have a laptop, you can usually connect to the wifi on the grounds of the Capitol so you do not even need to enter the building. You must use a laptop as the form will not work on a phone.

When can I drop a card?

You can only drop a card the day of the public hearing for the bill, when it is in either a House or Senate committee. You can drop a card starting an hour before the hearing is scheduled to start up until public testimony on the bill is complete.

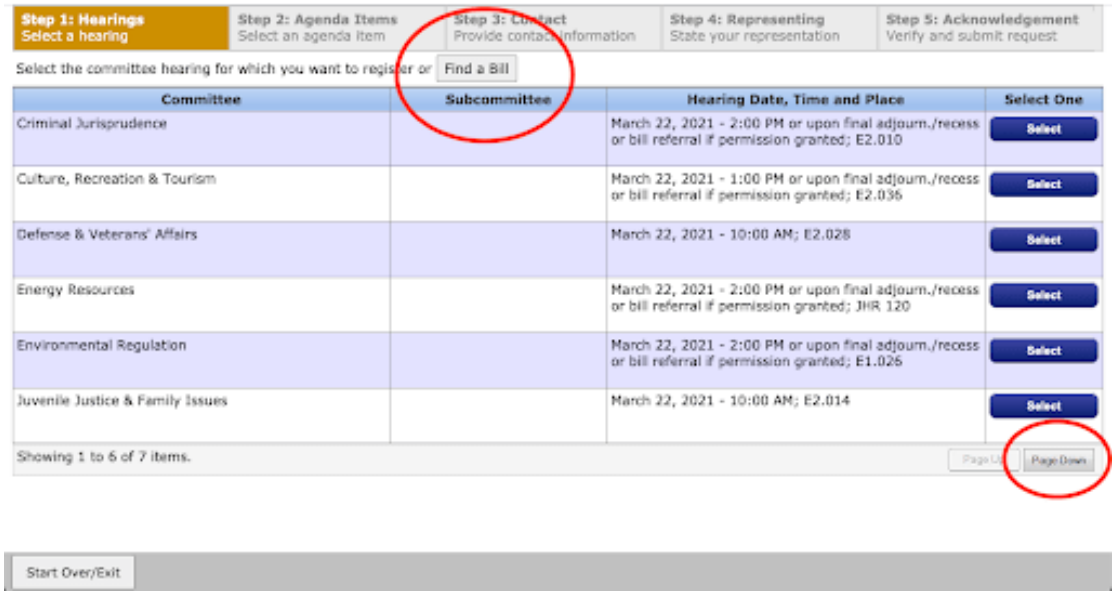
Step-by-step guide to dropping a card

1. Park at the Capitol Visitors Parking Garage (first two hours are free).
2. Log into the Capitol wifi with your laptop or tablet (the online portal will not work on a cell phone).
3. If you don’t have a laptop or tablet, there are kiosks inside you can use.
4. Go to the House or Senate Witness Registration Page:
    - For House bills (HB ##): http://hwrs.house.state.tx.us/
    - For Senate bills (SB ##): http://swrs.senate.state.tx.us/

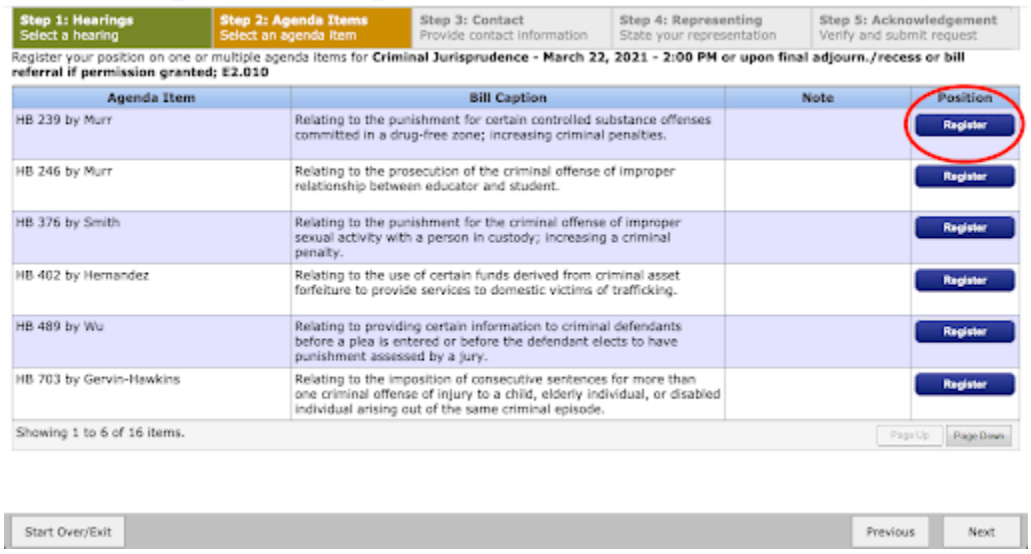
5. You will see the screen below. (This is a screenshot from the House website. The Senate website will look similar.) Click the “Begin” button at the bottom of the page.



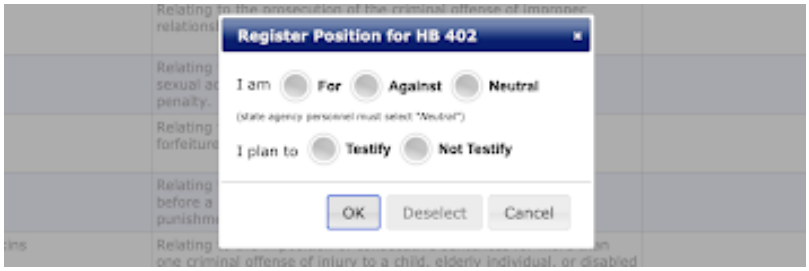
6. From the list of items, select the meeting you’re looking for or click “Find a Bill.”



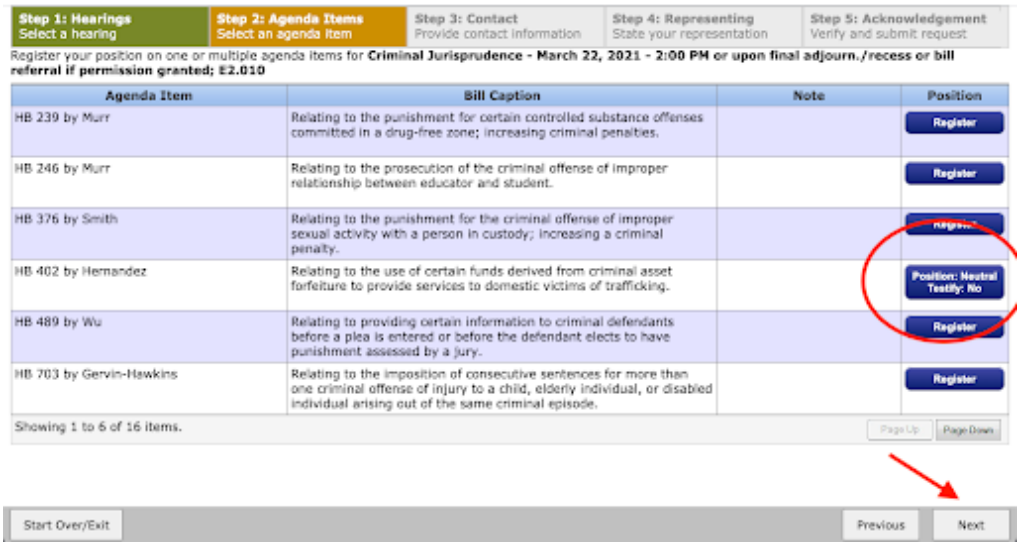
7. Click “Register” next to the bill you want to register your position on.



8. On the pop-up window, select whether you are “For” (in support of) or “Against” (opposed to) the bill. Also select whether or not you plan to testify. Select “Not Testify” if you are simply registering your position and not planning to speak, AKA dropping a card.



9. You will see your stance in the blue button next to the bill you registered for. Select “Next” to continue.



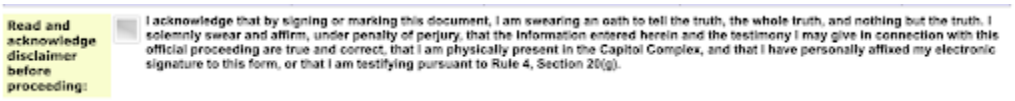
10. Enter your contact information. At the bottom you have the option to save this information for future registrations to complete this process more quickly in the future.



11. Enter your representation and occupation. When asked if you are an authorized representative of a group or organization, select “No” unless you have explicit permission to register on behalf of an organization. Even if you are there with fellow PTA members, you are speaking for yourself and should select “No.”



12. Click the box for the acknowledgement form, and you have officially dropped a card!



Appendix 3: How to Testify at the Texas Legislature

When can I testify?

In the legislative process, a bill is first assigned to a committee and the committee holds a public hearing. Members of the public may sign up to testify on the bill during the hearing, and legislators take these testimonies into account when they vote on whether the bill should move forward in the legislative process.

Why should I testify? Do legislators actually listen?

Public testimony is a crucial step in the legislative process, even if it seems like legislators do not always vote according to what the majority of those testifying are saying.

- Legislators absolutely need to hear from the public about how proposed bills would affect them and their community. If no one testifies, they could easily assume that no one feels strongly either way about a bill, and that their constituents are not watching how they vote on the bill.

- Representatives who are not on the committee and who are undecided on a bill may hear your testimony. People who are not able to travel to the hearing can also listen and know that someone is advocating for them. After hearings, clips from powerful testimonies are often shared on social media as a powerful tool to inform the public.

How to register to testify

Registration will open an hour before the committee hearing starts. The earlier you register, the earlier you will be called to testify.

You must be on Capitol grounds in order to register to testify. You can park at the Capitol Visitors Parking Garage (first two hours are free, then $1 for every half hour, with $12 max per day) or find street parking.

For House bills, you can create a profile on the House Witness Registration portal beforehand to save time.

Once you arrive at the Capitol, you can log into the Capitol wifi with your laptop or tablet (the online portal will not work on a cell phone). If you don't have a laptop or tablet, there are kiosks inside you can use.

Go to the House or Senate Witness Registration Page:

a. For House bills (HB ##): http://hwrs.house.state.tx.us/

b. For Senate bills (SB ##): http://swrs.senate.state.tx.us/

Follow the same instructions for dropping a card (see Appendix 2), but make sure to select "Yes" when asked if you plan to testify.

You can see a video of how to register here: https://house.texas.gov/videos/22660

How long does it take to testify?

Testifying at a public hearing at the Texas legislature is usually a full-day commitment. At the hearing, invited speakers will testify first, so public testimony does not typically start until the afternoon. Depending on the number of people who registered to testify, public testimony can last well into the evening, especially for high-profile bills.

Be sure to bring water, snacks, your phone/laptop charger, and anything else you might need for a long day. There is a restaurant called the Capitol Grill, open from 7 a.m.-5 p.m., if you want to get a meal.

If you are not able to remain at the Capitol all day, you can register in the morning and then monitor the livestream of the hearing to see when they begin public testimony. At that point you can drive back to the Capitol to listen for your name, but there is a risk that you will miss your chance. It is great to have a group of people you are testifying with who can monitor the hearing and send updates to those who have to leave.

If you have to leave before your name is called, you can give 20 printed copies of your testimony to the committee clerk and it will be shared with the committee.

What happens when my name is called?

You may be in the actual hearing room or in an overflow room if the hearing room is full when your name is called. You will walk to the front of the hearing room and sit at a table with 2-3 other people who are also testifying. The committee chair will call your name to speak. You will state your name and begin your testimony. You have two minutes to speak, and then a beep will let you know your time is up.

You may bring up a piece of paper or a phone or laptop to read your testimony from. You are not expected to memorize it.

After everyone on your panel testifies, the committee may ask follow-up questions. However, if you are a parent testifying on your experience with AISD, you do not need to be prepared to answer highly technical questions about public education; you just need to say why the bill matters to you and how it would affect your community.

It may seem daunting to testify at a public hearing, but remember that it is legislators' job to hear from the public, and it is an essential component to the legislative process. Focus on being succinct and direct, but also sincere and authentic.

Most legislators are not inside public schools every day, teaching children, volunteering in the classroom, going to PTA meetings, or interacting with students on a regular basis. They need to hear from folks who are on the ground to get a realistic picture of the current state of public education. They need to hear from the people who would be dealing with the real world effects of the decisions they make in the Capitol.

What should I say during my testimony?

- **Introduce yourself**—your name, where you are from, what role you play in your community

- **State your stance on the bill**—Are you against or in support?

- **Tell your story**—Sharing your personal experience is highly effective. Talk about why the bill matters to you and how it would affect your own children, school, colleagues, district, etc. Give anecdotes that illustrate why it's important for legislators to support or reject this bill.

- **Provide data**—If you have particularly compelling data to share, you can include that and indicate the source it came from.

- **Ask the legislators to take action**—urge them to vote no or yes on the bill.

- **Thank the committee for their time.**

You should thoroughly rehearse your testimony beforehand and make sure it's under two minutes long.

Sample Testimony

Hello, my name is Jean Jones. I'm a mom to two young children in public school, a 2nd-grader and a rising kindergartener, and I want to express my concern that the proposed substitute for House Bill 2 reduces the Basic Allotment increase from $395 to just $55 per student. That is not enough to meet rising costs and meet students' needs.

Schools in Texas are struggling, and we need to secure resources for them in this current legislative session. At our neighborhood public school, I have seen how our PTA has to fundraise constantly to meet student needs and support teachers. My son's classroom is one of many portables on our campus, and in some of those portables it was so humid that students'

papers were literally wet. The PTA had to use funds to purchase dehumidifiers for all the teachers; we could not get the money from the district.

Students at our school also had to play on a "field" for years that was just dirt and gravel, and so many kids, including my son, got really injured, with huge and deep scrapes from the gravel. Eventually the district stepped in to install grass, but only after years of advocating and trying to raise the money ourselves.

Our PTA will have to raise even more money next year in order to help pay the salaries of a part-time project specialist, part-time counselor, and content interventionist. PTAs should not have to do that, and I was shocked when my son started school and I found out that this was the reality of public education in Texas.

Our PTA also purchases art and music supplies, books for the library, PE equipment, and funds playground and landscaping improvements. The PTA has been looking into purchasing shade sails for some of the portable classrooms, because the doorknobs get so hot the kids burn themselves on them.

My son's school is lucky. We are in a high-income neighborhood and have parents who are able to contribute a lot of money so that our school can meet basic student and teacher needs and provide enrichment opportunities and community events that make our school a wonderful place. But in a public school, parents should not have to carry so much of this burden. Our government should do that with our tax dollars.

Many schools are not as lucky as us, and they should not have to suffer just because their PTA cannot raise enough money to purchase basic items. The district should be able to do that, but they can't, because public education is drastically underfunded in this state.

Our children are the future of Texas, and the vast majority of them attend a public school and will continue to do so even after the implementation of vouchers. They deserve a high-quality education as they are the future workers and innovators in our state.

I appreciate your hard work this session on public education. Please finish the job. Increase the Basic Allotment, and give our schools the tools they need to support strong student outcomes.

Appendix 4: How to Speak at a School Board Meeting

Austin ISD information on board meetings: https://www.austinisd.org/board/meetings

- Check out the board meeting agendas here
- Watch the meeting live on AISD.TV or Austin ISD Facebook

For Regular Board Voting Meetings (usually 4th Thursdays) or public hearings:

- For public testimony at a regular board voting meeting or public hearing, your comment must pertain to a specific agenda item. This includes consent agenda items, items for a separate vote, and items scheduled for a public hearing. You may also provide remarks for items categorized under “Student Achievement” on the board agenda.
- Meeting agendas are posted at least three business days before the start of all public meetings. The posted agenda will be available here.
- Call 512-414-0130 to sign up to speak in person OR record your 60-second remarks. You can call between 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. the day before the meeting and between 7:45 a.m. - 1 p.m. the day of the board meeting, unless otherwise posted in the agenda.
- When you call, you will be connected with an AISD representative. Please specify if you are choosing to provide an in-person public comment or if you would like to leave a pre-recorded message.
- After the phone greeting, you will hear a beep indicating that the recording has started. State your name and, if applicable, the agenda item you are addressing at the beginning of your comments.
- Prepare your comment ahead of time, as you will have 60 seconds plus a grace period to state your name. When the allotted time is reached, the recording will stop automatically.
- Please reference any staff members by position or by abbreviated last name.

There is no limit to the number of comments about each agenda item up for action. You may sign up to speak on or record comments for as many agenda items as you would like, but you will need to call in separately for each comment.

If you are providing your comments in Spanish, your comments will be aired in the original language followed by a reading of your comments translated into English.

For Board Information Sessions (usually 2nd Thursdays):

- For general public comment at a board information session, your comment can be about any topic and does not need to pertain to a particular agenda item. General public comment may be made in person or pre-recorded over the phone.

- During an information session, the board may schedule up to 60 speakers who wish to provide comments to the board. An additional 10 speakers may be placed on a waitlist to provide general public comment if time remains in the allotted 60 minutes for additional comments.

- Prepare what you want to say before placing your call.

- Call 512-414-0130 to record your 60-second remarks or sign up to speak in person. You can call between 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. the day before the meeting and between 7:45 a.m. - 1 p.m. the day of the board meeting, unless otherwise posted in the agenda. In-person speakers must sign up in advance. AISD cannot accommodate walk-in sign-ups.

- Always begin your public comment by stating your name and your role in or relationship to Austin ISD.

- When the allotted time is reached, the recording will stop automatically. You will have 60 seconds plus a grace period to state your name.

- Please reference any staff members by position or by abbreviated last name.

- If you are providing your comments in Spanish, your comments will be aired in the original language followed by a reading of your comments translated into English.

Please feel free to expand on your public comment by sending a detailed email about your public comment to trustees@austinisd.org

Appendix 5: Sample Plans of Work for Advocacy Chairs

Advocacy Plan of Work

Officer/Chairperson Name:

Position: Advocacy Chair Year: 2024-2025

Responsibilities/Duties:

- Educate community on advocacy issues and legislative priorities
- Share advocacy news, important dates (e.g. elections), and resources with Zilker community
- Help community identify their representatives
- Share and model opportunities for action
- Identify and partner with potential advocates in the community
- Listen to community members (administrators, teachers, parents, students) about challenges/issues important to them, help share their stories, and engage members to find solutions

Goal:

- Increase awareness of issues within our community and the greater Texas public education system
- Represent our school at PTA Rally Day
- Create committee of engaged, solutions-focused parents

Specific Action Steps (you may attach a document if needed)	**Start Date**	**Completion Date**
Include an advocacy share in every PTA newsletter and weekly on social media	Sept, 2024	May, 2025
Attend PTA Rally day with fellow members and students	Feb, 2025	February, 2025
Invite speakers to general meetings	Sept, 2024	May, 2025
Present at general meeting on public education funding	Sept, 2024	May, 2025
Model action by using a PTA meeting to call or write to representatives	Sept, 2024	May, 2025

Estimated Budget:

- $500 - bus and lunch for PTA Rally Day
- $50 - stamps and postcards

Resources Needed

Collaboration: (what other committees are involved)

- Communications Chair - how best to disseminate advocacy information/alerts
- Principal Smith - how to identify students to attend Rally Day

Communication Plan: (how and when will you inform parents and teachers)

- Advocacy share in every PTA newsletter
- Social media posts

Volunteers: (how many and who will identify) - may need volunteers for Rally Day

Evaluation Process: (we will be successful if…)

- Hear from community members that they were empowered to take action
- Create a longstanding advocacy chair position that gives community members a way to be heard

Committee Members: TBD

Advocacy Plan of Work

Officer/Chairperson Name:

Position: Advocacy Chair **Year: 2025-2026**

Responsibilities/Duties:

- Educate community on advocacy issues and legislative priorities
- Share advocacy news, important dates (e.g. elections), and resources with school community
- Share and model opportunities for action
- Identify and partner with potential advocates in the community
- Listen to community members about challenges/issues important to them, help share their stories, and engage members to find solutions

Goal:

- Increase awareness of legislative issues affecting public education
- Increase participation of PTA members in calls to action

Specific Action Steps	Start Date	Completion Date	Budget
Include an advocacy share in every PTA newsletter and weekly on social media	Sept, 2025	May, 2026	$0
Send out calls to action via email when PTA members need to take a stand on an issue	As needed	Ongoing	$0
Encourage and coordinate a group to attend Straight Talk in February	Feb, 2026	Feb, 2026	$0
Invite speakers to general meetings	As needed	Ongoing	$0
Host a civics presentation for grades 4-5 through Worker Bee Civics	Sept, 2025	Dec, 2026	$500
Include advocacy in school events (e.g. voter registration, secure gun storage information)	Sept, 2025	Ongoing	$0

Resources Needed

Collaboration: (what other committees are involved)

- Communications Chair - how best to disseminate advocacy information/alerts
- Principal Smith - coordinate on civics presentation and advocacy participation in school events

Communication Plan: (how and when will you inform parents and teachers)

- Advocacy share in every PTA newsletter
- Social media posts
- Dedicated emails for calls to action

Evaluation Process: (we will be successful if…)

- Hear from community members that they were empowered to take action

Committee Members: Interested parents and community members

Other Resources: ACPTA Google group; non-profit organizations engaging in public education advocacy; current district legislators; legislative blogs, websites, and social media accounts

Plan of Work (Plan de Trabajo)

Officer/Chairman Name:
(Nombre de Oficial/Presidente de Junta) Diane Ravitch

Position: (Posición) Advocacy Chair **Year: (Año)** 2024-2025

Responsibilities/ Duties: (Responsabilidades)	Share advocacy information from the TX PTA and Austin Council of PTA's with my community, invite speakers to share advocacy information at PTA meetings, and find ways to encourage engagement in my community.	**Committee Members: (Miembros del Comité)**	Diane Ravitch, Clara Hemphill, Anthony Cody
Goal: (Meta)	Educate our community about issues that affect our schools, identify and nurture advocates in the community,train interested parties how to advocate for their issues.	**Evaluation Process: (Proceso de Evaluación)**	Increase number of people who come to meetings and engage on related social media over time.

Specific Action Steps (Proceso Especifico de Acción)	**Start Date (Fecha de Empiezo)**	**Completion Date (Fecha de Terminación)**	**Budget (Presupueso)**
SHARE: Work with campus communication team to ensure advocacy messages from the ACPTA and TX PTA are getting distributed to my community through newsletters, social media, and other communication avenues.	September	May	$0
EDUCATE: Invite speakers to come to PTA meetings to talk about advocacy issues.	Sept. 16, Nov. 11, Feb. 20, Mar 18		$0
ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT: Host and encourage postcard-writing parties. Host movie nights sharing documentaries about educational issues. Host a monthly book club for advocates.	September	May	$100 (SNACKS)
TOTAL			$100

Resources: (Recursos)	• Texas PTA • Austin Council of PTAs • Who Represents Me?