

Is Your PTA an ATM for Your School

by Betsy Landers and Jeanice Aikens

Have you ever felt that your PTA was an ATM for your school principal and teachers? Have you ever felt like your principal thought your PTA budget was his or her discretionary spending fund? do you get requests from teachers and school staff to fund certain projects and items that really ought to be part of the school budget?

You're not alone. PTAs frequently turn over their funds to school administration for such basics as books, equipment, and maintenance, not to mention extras, such as playground equipment and vending machines. The customs that have developed between PTAs and schools have blurred the line about what PTAs are; what vision, mission, and purposes we follow; and how our funds should be used.

Vision, mission, and purposes

PTA's vision is making every child's potential a reality. PTA's mission is to be

- * A powerful voice for all children,
- * A relevant resource for families and communities, and
- * A strong advocate for the education and well-being of every child.

PTA's purposes, or historical goals are as follows:

- * 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 into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education children and youth
- * To develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, social and spiritual education

How PTAs work

The national PTA organization is a separate legal entity having both a Federal tax number (FEIN) and IRS 501(c)3 exempt status.

Each local PTA unit elects a separate board and officers, and only the elected officers can contractually bind that unit and only for their term of office.

PTA budgets can only be ratified and approved by PTA members.

PTA funds raised by PTA members belong exclusively to PTA and can only be used for purposes approved by its members through the budgetary and amending process. Approved uses of funds should be in line with the mission and objectives of the PTA body as a whole.

What PTAs are not

PTAs are not a supporting organization for the schools where they hold our meetings. Supporting organizations often contract directly with school districts to act on behalf of the schools and are subject to school oversight and approvals for such items as their budgets.

PTAs do not have teachers or members of the school system holding office in local units. Such an arrangement comprises a conflict of interest and will be used to demonstrate that the local unit is acting as a supporting organization.

PTAs are not an additional funding resource for goods, services, and payroll for public schools. School funds should be supplied by governmental entities. PTAs advocate for the adequate funding of schools from governmental sources. They do not replace funds not supplied by governments. Therefore, supplies purchased using PTA funds should be given directly to children not to teachers.

PTAs are not to pay bills handed over by the principal of the school. If the school ordered it, the school pays for it.

Remember who we are

If your school board, principal, or teachers assume control of your PTA's budget as though it were their own, just say "no." Remember that PTA doesn't work for the school - it works on behalf of children and families.

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