

Where Social Media and PTA Advocacy Collide

Social media is a powerful tool that is changing the way people absorb information, mobilize for advocacy, and raise awareness about issue campaigns. Research shows that more than 90 percent of people trust peer recommendations, but only 33 percent trust messages from brands and organizations. This is the power of social media, where networks are comprised of friends, family, community, and connections, which allows organizations to amplify a singular message and spread it quickly.

The implication for PTAs at all levels is significant. If people talk and share information about PTA and its issue campaigns, their friends on social media are more likely to respond favorably than they would to a message directly from PTA. PTA units at all levels will benefit from how quickly information can be shared and how much of their followers' networks can see their posts and activities

Getting Started

If your PTA is not already on a social media website but wants to be, the first step is simple: sign up! It's free! Make sure that you give plenty of thought to the name of your page or account, because once you open the account, you will not be able to change it without losing your fans or followers. Also make sure that you have a clear process for determining who will be the primary user. Typically, the unit or state president, communications director, or advocacy/legislative director would be a good choice for handling social media accounts, but some units or affiliates may determine that another person is the correct fit. Be sure to keep track of the login information and distribute it to people you trust so that at the end of the term, or when people move on, the information to your social media accounts is not lost.

Once you are on a social media site, do not feel compelled to immediately start posting content. If you are unsure of how things work or what sort of content is appropriate for you to post, take some time to get a feel for how the channel works. Monitor comparable users and pages, and discover what you think works well and what does not. A good way to begin putting content out while learning how to use the system is to simply share or repost what National PTA (and/or your state PTA, if you are working with a local unit) has posted.

Speak to your audience. Learn where they are. Are most of your volunteers active on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest or all three? Each platform appeals to a different audience, so take that into consideration when you are venturing out.

To effectively use and leverage social media, think critically about how you can make your content short, compelling and relevant. Experiment with different types of posts, sometimes sharing links to videos or blogs and using images and video to get a better idea of what resonates with your audience. It's all about creating engagement and conversation. You want to get people's attention around a certain issue. Make sure your message is clear when they tune in.

Building PTA Awareness

The social media platforms Facebook and Twitter can serve as "conversation catalysts" for education reform and child advocacy. Simply bringing awareness to PTA efforts is very effective for membership growth, member participation, volunteer development and most importantly, strategically advancing your issue campaign. Experiment with education quotes, education news stories, simple status updates about new initiatives you are working on and sharing/cross-promoting with partners to see what works best for your audience. Don't be afraid to ask your partners and members to repost or share some of your most successful posts.

Facebook

Organizations use "pages" on Facebook rather than personal profiles. You can create a page from your personal Facebook account, grant other PTA leaders editorial access to the page and post on behalf of your PTA. On a page, you can post content on a central wall, including photos, questions and surveys, news bulletins, tips and videos, all while interacting directly with commenters. Facebook users have the option to "like" your page, which means that the content you post on your page wall can show up in their news feeds.

Keep these Facebook best practices in mind as you move forward with your advocacy efforts:

- **Consider your post frequency.** This is a delicate balancing act. Post too little and your posts are unlikely to end up in your fans' news feeds, but post too much and your fans are likely to "unlike" you. Once your page is up, try to post once or twice a day if possible.
- **Develop relationships.** Get to know the people who are frequently commenting on the page. Engage in conversation with them by asking questions and responding to posts.
- **Find a voice that works for your PTA and use it.** You should adopt a voice for your association that allows multiple people to actively respond to comments and concerns in a positive, knowledgeable way while also being consistent in tone.
- **Make your page "sticky."** Maximize user experience by making your content more engaging. You want them to stay there as long as they can and enjoy their time on the page. Try to have links back to your website.

National PTA on Facebook: Check out and "Like" National PTA's Facebook Page - [Facebook.com/ParentTeacherAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/ParentTeacherAssociation)

Twitter

Twitter allows users to share short messages up to 140-characters in length. Due to the brevity of its messages, Twitter is an ideal channel to share straightforward information including your advocacy efforts, statistics, event promotion and member recognition. Users can post video footage, images and links to refer Twitter followers to external sites. Twitter is also the preferred channel for sharing live information. For example, participants can tweet throughout a PTA function to give followers updates and quick tidbits of information about the event.

Keep these Twitter best practices in mind as you move forward with your advocacy efforts:

- **Respond quickly.** Stay current with Twitter mentions and respond to any questions or concerns within two hours.
- **Choose who you follow.** Follow people who are interested in the same issues as you. You should also follow individuals who actively engage with you, either by retweeting your posts or tweeting at you.

- **Build a relationship with users.** Be sure to thank people for mentioning you, following you or just comment on some thing they said that was interesting. If they post interesting content, feel free to retweet it. Generally, people will follow you if you genuinely reach out to them.
- **Join the conversation.** If people are talking about things that matter to you, feel free to join the conversation!

National PTA on Twitter - [Twitter.com/NationalPTA](https://twitter.com/NationalPTA)

Dealing with Negative Comments

Negative comments are an inevitable part of social media, especially around issues that people feel passionately about. To be successful on social media, you have to be willing to take the good with the bad and recognize that you cannot control what other users say—you can only control how you react. Engagement is a sign that your campaign is attracting attention and that people are interested in sharing their opinions, both positive and constructive. In many cases, a post that you find disagreeable or contrary to your own opinion may not provide grounds for deletion. If you delete every post that you find objectionable, you may escalate the problem or alienate users on your page. Grounds for deleting a post include: use of profanity or derogatory language, personal insults or disrespectful language against another user or spam or overly solicitous content.

For most comments, it is best to respond in a respectful way and provide accurate information to support your position. Remain calm, judicious and refrain from sharp, heated posts.

Interactions with Elected Officials or Members of the Administration

It is ok to interact with elected officials or members of an executive administration (whether this be at the federal or state level) with regards to legislation. In fact, using your unit or state affiliate's Facebook and Twitter accounts to reach out to your elected officials to support or oppose legislation is an excellent way to make your voice heard for every child. However, because PTA is a nonprofit organization, you must refrain from interacting with the campaigns of elected officials or posting/reposting a message from anyone that has a campaign message for any candidate.