

Frequently Asked Questions: Advocating for School Safety

National PTA[®] has a rich history of advocating on behalf of our nation's children – particularly as it relates to their safety and well-being. In the wake of a tragedy like the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, PTA members intuitively look for solutions to better protect children. It is advocacy and it is at the core of PTA's mission.

PTA advocacy means supporting and speaking up for children—in schools, in communities, and before government bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children. This document serves as a guide for ways in which PTA members can advocate effectively as our communities, states and country look for solutions to prevent future tragedies.

General Advocacy FAQs:

Q: As a PTA leader, I am being inundated with requests for meetings, statements, letter sign-ons, rallies, bill endorsements, etc. What is our role?

As a PTA leader you play a valuable role - one in which the community will look to in the aftermath of a tragedy like the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Being proactive and involved in advocacy efforts is well within your role. However, it is important that any involvement is aligned with PTA's mission and policy positions. Becoming familiar with the accompanying documents on PTA's positions and resolutions – as well as those in your own Congress – is an important first step.

While some requests may be time-sensitive, it is also important to be strategic. You cannot be everything to everybody. As you receive requests, develop a process, including a vetting process, to ensure that your advocacy efforts are consistent, sustainable and strategic.

Q: I'm not sure we should sign-on to this letter, endorse this bill, reply to this media request, etc. Who can I contact?

If you feel unsure about whether you should be involved in a particular initiative or effort, know that National PTA is ready to assist and talk through any questions or concerns you may have.

If national media outlets request comments or interviews on the school shooting or National PTA positions related to school violence and firearms, please refer them to James Martinez, Senior Manager of Media Relations with National PTA. You can reach him directly at 571-329-

9352 or jmartinez@pta.org. If you need assistance responding to local, regional or state media, National PTA can also be a resource.

Local Advocacy

Q: How can PTAs be involved locally?

The first step is making sure you are informed about existing plans, procedures, and needs. Does your school have an emergency preparedness plan? Is it adequate? Are there potential funding challenges that have prevented schools from being fully prepared for emergencies?

Once you know how prepared your school is – and what potential challenges there are – you are then better able to advocate effectively. Writing an editorial for the local newspaper, holding a petition drive, speaking before a school board meeting, or sending a letter to elected officials can be effective ways to voice your opinion and gain support from decision makers for violence prevention programs in your community. You can influence decisions that affect the safety and well-being of our children by working with other concerned parents, teachers, and community members.

Q: Is our school adequately prepared for an emergency? Who do I speak to?

Many schools have violence prevention plans and crisis management teams in place. These plans include descriptions of school safety policies, detection of early warning signs in children, intervention strategies, emergency response plans, and post-crisis procedures. The most effective violence prevention and response plans are developed in cooperation with school and health officials, parents, and community members.

Ask your school's principal about the emergency preparedness plan in place to handle an emergency or crisis situations. Be aware that some states are not required to make public the full plan for safety reasons. In these cases, you should still be able to access basic framework and guidelines.

Q: What should I look for in my school's emergency preparedness plan?

Comprehensive emergency preparedness plans should include the designation of a parent/child reunification location, use of school public address/automatic call systems in the event of an emergency, lock-down procedures, etc. Parents should inquire as to admittance procedures

during school hours, number of trainings and drills per school year, and collaboration with local law enforcement.

Q: How can I help my school better prepare for emergencies and protect students?

The first step is to be informed about existing plans and procedures. Effective emergency preparedness plans are routinely revisited to identify areas of improvement. Find ways to collaborate effectively with school staff and fellow parents and community members to best prepare for emergency situations. Encourage your child’s school to publish the emergency plan in parent/student handbooks, on the school website, and to distribute via backpack mail mail/email. The U.S. Department of Education provides many resources to help schools create and update School Emergency Management Plans, including:

- [Practical Information on Crisis Planning](#)
- [Steps for Developing a School Emergency Preparedness Plan](#)
- [Components of Comprehensive School and School District Emergency Management Plans](#)

State and Federal Advocacy

Q: Our State PTA wants to endorse state legislation, petition the Governor, join a coalition, etc. Should we?

As a leading voice for parents and families, State Congresses should feel comfortable taking part in advocacy efforts if they align with PTA’s mission and positions. Although National PTA does not take positions on state-level legislation, staff are available to provide technical assistance should you have questions or concerns. Contacting staff at National PTA is also important – as they can connect and share what other State Congresses may be doing in the same arena.



Q: Our State PTA wants to/has been asked to endorse federal legislation, contact our Members of Congress, etc. Should we?

Again, as a leading voice for parents and families, State Congresses should feel comfortable advocating policy priorities at the federal level. National PTA will communicate federal advocacy efforts through communication with State PTA leaders, PTA Takes Action newsletters, social media, and more. In an effort to organize our federal advocacy efforts in the most effective way, we ask that you contact National PTA Government Affairs staff before taking part in any federal advocacy effort unless requested by National PTA.

For more information, please contact Elizabeth Rorick, Deputy Executive Director of Government Affairs and Communications at erorick@pta.org, or visit our website at PTA.org.