TEACHER NEGOTIATIONS, SANCTIONS, AND STRIKES

Teacher negotiations, sanctions, and strikes are very much a part of the reality of operating public schools. While there are great variations throughout the country in the intensity of teacher militancy, no school system can escape the necessity of responding to the growing voice in educational decision-making. Not only do school boards and school administrators have to reckon with teacher militancy, but PTA becomes involved.

The PTA, because of its strategic position, has become involved in activities related to negotiations and may find itself on the horns of several dilemmas.

1. If the PTA provides volunteers to man the classrooms during a work stoppage, in the interest of protecting the immediate safety and welfare of children, it is branded as a strike breaker.

2. If the PTA does not take sides in issue being negotiated, it is accused of not being interested.

3. If it supports the positions of the board of education, which is the representative of the public in negotiations, the teacher members of the PTA have threatened to withdraw membership and boycott the local PTA activities.

As a result, PTA leadership in local units, councils, and states has expressed an urgent need for guidance in this difficult situation.

Guide to State Congresses

The best efforts of state PTAs in regard to teacher negotiations, sanctions, and strikes start with alertness before a situation arises.

1. Study state laws regarding negotiations, sanctions, and strikes so as to act within the law, and so that counsel to local units will be consistent with the law.

2. Seek to bring together in conference meetings the state leadership of all groups concerned for the purpose of mutual understanding.

3. Encourage state legislation which will improve the procedures for negotiations and resolution of impasse.

4. Help local units understand particular state issues involved.

5. Urge school boards and teachers to establish frequent and regular lines of communication about educational concerns.

Guidelines for Councils and Local Units
Position Statement: Teacher Negotiations, Sanctions, and Strikes
Adopted: by the 1977 Board of Directors

Because situations locally vary so widely, both across the country and even within states, guidelines cannot be highly specific. A great deal of discretion in action is left to the council and the local unit. These are suggested measures for action organized appropriately to three phases: the pre-strike period, during the strike, and after the strike. These guidelines, plus counsel from the state PTA and the basic good judgement of the people, should enable the council and the local PTAs to minimize the dilemmas and to contribute constructively to community understanding, teacher satisfactions, renewal of cordial parent-teacher dialogue, and improved educational climate for children.

Pre-strike Period

1. Continue to work for quality education. Efforts in this regard reassure teachers that parents are helping to achieve their goals of greater job satisfactions and improvement of substandard salaries.

2. Be alert to early symptoms of teacher dissatisfaction:
   a. Abnormal turnover in teaching staff and administrators.
   b. Teacher-supported legislation defeated by state legislature.
   c. Growing dissatisfaction of teachers as evidenced by complaints.

3. Seek action that corrects the basic causes of dissatisfaction --salaries, student conduct, teaching conditions, lack of participation in decision-making.

4. Inform the officers of teachers' organizations, the school boards, and administrators of the appropriate role PTA might play in the event of a work stoppage, and be advised as to provisions for the welfare and safety of children during work stoppage.

5. Urge school boards and local teachers' organizations to consider the advisability of developing written agreements on negotiation procedures, including grievance procedures. Because work stoppages and negotiations are often times conducted in a way that tends to create dissension and low morale that are harmful to children, the PTA should do all it can to prevent such situations from developing. The advance planning and the orderly procedures embodied in written agreements may avert strikes.

6. Learn from the school board and the teachers' organizations what issues are being negotiated.

7. Provide full public airing of the issues. The purpose of these discussions is to dispel confusion and develop intelligent, informed public opinion. If a strong majority opinion develops regarding an issue that affects children, the PTA has a responsibility to bring this to the attention of the negotiating parties. PTAs should be keenly aware that the
decisions made in negotiations often times have much more of an impact upon the welfare of children than to temporary closing of school and other disruptive action.

8. Reexamine the role of teacher members in the local unit. Teachers as well as parents should join and participate by individual choice. Their motivation to participate should spring from a professional awareness of the unique contributions which they may render, and the value of teacher rapport with parents and the community. The teacher continues as a willing partner in the PTA when participation is free of unwarranted expectations.

During the Strike

1. Urge immediate and continuous negotiations and if necessary mediation to get schools open as soon as possible. If negotiation is delayed, the PTA should seek to bring the school board representatives and teachers' organization representatives together.

2. Serve as an open forum to inform the public on the points of disagreements and the progress of negotiations.

3. PTA should not man the classrooms, except possibly for a day in the absence of advance notice of a strike. Not only is manning of classrooms inconsistent with PTA efforts to obtain a qualified teacher in every classroom, but personal liability may be incurred. If the school administration intends to keep the schools open during a teacher walkout, it should develop a corps of volunteers outside the PTA structure.

4. Suggest and urge appropriate action by parents, community agencies, and volunteer groups that will protect children during the period the school is closed.

5. Encourage the full and continuous participation of teacher members in PTA activities.

After the Strike

1. Plan activities that will restore harmony, promote teacher morale, and renew parent-teacher dialogue.

2. Through informed public opinion see that the negotiated agreements, which settled the strike, are faithfully implemented.

3. Work for community understanding and support of school needs.

Adopted: by the 1977 Board of Directors
Revised: by the 1981, 1987 and 1993 Board of Directors