



## NEWSLETTERS WITH IMPACT

Why do a newsletter?

A good newsletter will:

- ✓ Encourage parent involvement with the child – in the home and in the school.
- ✓ Inform every family in the school of the goals and accomplishments of the unit.
- ✓ Encourage attendance at PTA meetings and involvement in PTA projects and activities.
- ✓ Foster cooperation with the school to keep parents informed of school functions and issues.
- ✓ Inform the community about PTA activities and school functions.

### Ideas to Make Your Newsletter Better

- ? **Feedback** helps to find out whether the publication is achieving its goals. Take an opinion poll at an executive board meeting. Insert a questionnaire in issues periodically to learn which information is most helpful to readers.
- ? **Encourage others to contribute** to the newsletter, website, and other publications. This could be a guest article, a “Teacher’s Corner” feature, a note from the principal, or – a sure readership booster – a column featuring student work. Tell potential contributors how much space is available for their articles and offer suggestions to assist them.
- ? **Go after stories.** Be on the alert for coming events that should be publicized.
- ? **Report results** of events and fund raisers, publicize membership campaigns, and announce PTA award recipients.
- ? **Remember, people don’t usually read, they skim.** Make sure your message is easy to find. Keep messages brief and to the point. Strategically use bullets, quotes, charts, and graphics.
- ? **Keep it simple.** Graphic design (both print and electronic) should be clean and uncluttered. Avoid graphics that overwhelm the reader and distract from the content.
- ? **Proofread everything! Twice! (Then have someone else proofread it.)**



### Translating Materials

It’s important for many reasons that PTAs cultivate a board representing all the major language groups at the school – translation services are an added benefit! Where there is no one on the board to translate materials, here are some other possibilities:

- Bilingual parents at the school;
- Teachers or aides in the classrooms, office staff or the school district;
- Upper grade students, who might be able to earn language arts extra credit as well as PTA recognition;
- The foreign language departments at local high schools, where students often need to complete community service hours; also try community colleges and universities.

Where there are parents whose language does not have a written form, such as Hmong or Assyrian, or illiterate parents, newsletters can use visual clues – illustrations and graphic logos – to help parents recognize the subject matter of articles and prompt them to seek information. Some units present side-by-side translations of articles on each page or on flip sides of a sheet. Others print or post a separate issue. Still others offer all information in English with short recaps of major information in languages needed in their school community. The California State PTA offers grants to unit, council and district PTAs to pay for translation services. The deadline for applications is in the fall. Information and forms are in the *Toolkit*. (Adapted from the California State PTA Toolkit)

# Guidelines



- **Adhere to PTA noncommercial, nonpartisan and nonsectarian policies.**
- **All material must be approved** by the PTA president and school principal prior to printing.
  - The principal is responsible for the accuracy of school information and compliance with the State Education Code and school district policy.
  - The PTA president is responsible for the accuracy of PTA information and compliance with PTA policies.
- **Don't badmouth.** Never present material critical of any individual or group.

To do so reflects poorly on the PTA and could expose the PTA to a potential libel suit.

- **Use PTA “branding.”** Incorporate the statewide membership theme and PTA logo in PTA communications. This will show a unity of effort and purpose, as well as demonstrate the unit’s participation in a national organization.
- **Safety first.** Avoid publishing the last name and phone number of any volunteer who handles PTA funds.
- **Be succinct.** Print only a summary of actions taken from the PTA association meeting minutes.
- **Be sensitive to privacy issues.** Do not publish, without written permission, personal information about students or adults. This includes:
  - Photographs of students or adults (with/without first or full names);
  - Home addresses and/or telephone numbers of students or adults;
  - E-mail addresses of students or adults; and
  - Student or adult names or class schedules.
- **Date all materials.**
- **Make it easy for the reader to identify and find the PTA.** List the following items:
  - Name of the unit, council or district PTA;
  - Contact information (units should use school address; council and district PTA should use office or mailing address); and
  - Name of other PTA levels to which the unit belongs (council and district PTA, California State PTA and National PTA).
  - Most important, include an e-mail address and phone number, so that a member can be reached for more information about the organization.
- **Be correct.** Check the “Details Count” handout or the *California State PTA Toolkit* Style Guide (6.1.5, 260) for correct PTA terminology and formatting.
- **Observe copyright laws.** Get permission to copy something from another source in writing (e-mails work). The small © may note the holder of the copyright. Keep your letter or e-mail request on file as well as the reply. PTA publications may use very brief quotes from an article without getting permission beforehand. Laws are strict regarding creative material such as poetry or cartoons. California State PTA articles and art work may be used without permission, but check National PTA materials before assuming they can be used. Always credit the source!



*Adapted from the California State PTA Toolkit*

# PTA Is Noncommercial

## ADVERTISING

**PTAs sometimes must pay taxes on ad revenue.** Promoting sponsors through advertising in PTA communications is discouraged, but not forbidden. Be aware that advertising revenue may be considered taxable “unrelated business income.” The IRS will be looking to see if your PTA:



- Is providing excessive exposure of the sponsor’s name, logo or corporate message. Associating the name of the sponsor with the name of a PTA event would not, by itself, trigger the Unrelated Business Income Tax.
- Is basing the amount of exposure the sponsor’s name and logo receives, or media exposure promoted, upon the amount of payment.

**Follow school district rules.** Talk with the school principal. School districts may have policies that forbid students to carry home publications containing commercial advertising or forbid the electronic posting of commercial advertising on a school website.

**Your newsletter may cost more to mail.** U.S. Postal Service rates for charitable publications with advertising differ from those without advertising, and postal permits may differ as well. The mailing may be rejected if these guidelines are not met.

**Any advertising should be screened** to ensure it meets PTA standards and is not objectionable for young children to see. This might mean accepting advertising from some businesses while rejecting others, which could create an embarrassing situation.

**Avoid exploitation** by individuals, businesses, and others who would appeal to the PTA’s commitment to support schools by using the PTA newsletter, website, or other publications.

**Disclaimer:** The California State PTA strongly advises the printing of a disclaimer:

*“The mention of any business or service in this publication does not imply an endorsement by the \_\_\_\_\_ PTA.”*

**Bottom line:** The noncommercial policy should be applied with good judgment, discretion, and common sense. Recognize that it is not meant to prohibit all contact, cooperation, or partnerships with commercial businesses. The California State PTA strongly recommends finding sponsors rather than accepting advertising. For more information, check the *Toolkit* section on Sponsorship vs. Endorsement 5.9.4a.

## ACKNOWLEDGING ASSISTANCE

Thank funders and sponsors, rather than endorse them. One sentence should do it!

- ♥ *“The Sunshine PTA newsletter (website) is printed (posted) courtesy of John Doe Printers.”*
- ♥ *“The Sunshine PTA expresses grateful appreciation to John Doe Hardware for making this publication possible.”*
- ♥ *“The Sunshine PTA expresses grateful appreciation to the following merchants for making our student play possible: John Doe Hardware, Mary Green Fabrics and Romano Pizza.”*
- ♥ *“The Sunshine PTA thanks the Burger Place for their work with our students on the Let’s Do It! Recycling Program.”*
- ♥ *“The Sunshine PTA expresses thanks to Neighborhood Bank for the use of its parking lot for the car wash.”*
- ♥ *“The Sunshine PTA wishes to thank KXYZ for the PTA membership promotion ads aired during our membership enrollment.”*
- ♥ *“Sunshine PTA thanks Romano Pizza for the generous offer to donate 10 percent of all sales made on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).”*



Collecting receipts and labels for specific PTA projects may require acknowledging certain commercial interests. Be as generic as possible.

*“Sunshine PTA will collect soup labels and cereal box tops for the next semester. Call Jane Doe at 123-4567 for information.”*

# Mailing Your Newsletter

## Nonprofit Mailing Permits

To save money on mailing newsletter and printed materials, a PTA may apply for the special nonprofit bulk mailing rate. File an application on *Form PS-3624* and submit to the U.S. Postal Service with a:

- Check for the annual mailing fee (ask the postmaster for current rates);
- Letter from the IRS showing proof of exemption, available from the California State PTA office; and
- Copy of either the bylaws or Articles of Incorporation.

If the application is approved, the PTA may mail at rates for qualified nonprofit organizations upon payment of an annual mailing fee. The application form need not be filed each year, but to keep the permit active, a mailing must be made once a year and the annual mailing fee paid. The U.S. Postal Service will bill annually for the fee.



## Requirements for bulk mail

Requirements include:

- Two hundred or more *identical* pieces of mail (or a minimum of 50 pounds).
- No handwritten materials can be included; if handwritten materials are included, the mail must be sent First Class and the unit pays accordingly.

Contact the U.S. Postal Service for packaging and rate requirement and regulations.

- All items must contain paper identical in size and the same number of sheets per piece.
- Inserts directed to certain persons require that the piece be sent by First Class mail.
- Items must include the return address of the PTA bulk permit owner and the zip code in the address of each piece. All pieces must be sorted by zip code. Stapled materials may not be acceptable.
- Material must be of sender's origin. No circulars or brochures of other organizations may be included in the mailing. However, information from other organizations may be summarized in the newsletter.

A council that wishes to provide its units with nonprofit bulk rate mailing privileges may do so by submitting the *PS-3624* application form with other application requirements. If the council has a permit, each unit may apply to mail under the existing permit number held by the council. Authorization is a copy of the bylaws and a letter from the council. Each unit applying for authorization to mail under the council permit is required to submit its bylaws to show that it is a "sub-organization" of the council. No additional fee is required from the sub-organization.



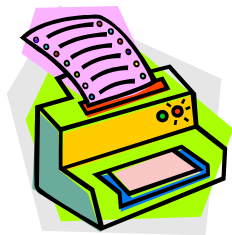
Postal rates vary and are subject to change. Check with local postmaster. Rates vary and are subject to change. Work with the treasurer to assure that the bulk rate mail fees are paid.

Adapted from the California State PTA Toolkit

# Print Newsletter Basics



- In a four- (or eight-) page newsletter, use pages 1, 3 and 4 (or 8) for the most important articles.
- Use articles, pull quotes, or graphics in groups of twos and threes on a page. An unbalanced page is the strongest.
- Two columns are easiest to read and take up less space. Three columns will add design flexibility and allow the use of photos.
- White space in the design will help the reader to focus on content.
- Headlines are to inform. They break up the page like a graphic. Headlines are easier to read when placed flush with the left hand margin of each column. Capitalize the first letter of each word or just the first word – either is fine, just be consistent. Using ALL CAPITAL LETTERS is difficult to read, however you can use Two SIZES of capital type for special effects.
- Break long headlines into two lines. Italic headlines can be used to draw attention to shorter articles.
- Use a table of contents for a lengthy newsletter.
- Illustrations, graphics or photos should be used sparingly to draw the reader's attention to an article.
- Quotes or subtitles that are offset from the text function like graphics, creating a professional editorial look.
- Pictures of people should be cropped at the body joints. The head of an individual should be no smaller than a dime. Try to keep group shots to less than six people.



## Printing

- Printing or photocopying a newsletter depends on the amount budgeted, the time, equipment and talents available. If the newsletter is to be copied on a machine at the school site, PTA has the responsibility for making arrangements — in advance — with site personnel for the use of copying equipment, which may include purchase of paper and ink, toner and other supplies. Always arrange to use equipment at times convenient for staff.
- If printing is done at a print shop or copy center, obtain bids from at least three print shops before choosing one. Remember only the president can legally sign contracts. To obtain accurate prices, present each with exactly the same information. Anything other than camera-ready copy will cost extra. Check for PTA discounts at the National PTA website: [www.pta.org/jp\\_membership\\_benefits.html](http://www.pta.org/jp_membership_benefits.html). Check the back of your membership card for a password,
- Give edited copy to the printer by the expected date. Ask what the turn-around time is from submission to the finished product.
- Mark copy carefully so instructions are clear. Keep a duplicate of all copy submitted.
- Prepare a “dummy” showing what the final product should look like, with the size, pages, folds and direction of all printed information as it should appear on the final product.
- If the newsletter is mailed, labels and mailing lists should be regularly and carefully checked. Mail only one newsletter to each household.

# Details Count

**C** For titles in text, capitalize all words but the articles (a, an, the), conjunctions (and, or, for, but), and prepositions of four letters or less (with, to, on, upon, into) and names of PTAs/PTSAs, (Sun Elementary PTA and Twenty-Fifth District PTA).

**A**

**P** Do not capitalize association, council, district PTA or university when used alone. Do not capitalize seasons of the year, directions (north, southeast), state, nation, federal, flag.

**I**

**T**

**A**

**L**

**S** Use typeset *italic* or **boldface** for titles of books, periodicals, movies, videos, plays, operas, reports, pamphlets, and kits (California State PTA *Toolkit*).

**1** Spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence, except for calendar years; One through nine, above 10 use numerals; First through ninth, after 10th use numerals; and round numbers, *two hundred children*.

**2**

**3** Use numerals for large numbers such as million and billion, *\$12 million*;

Percentages, spell out word percent, *15 percent*; Ages, *age 3 to 6, 26-year-old* (hyphenate); Grade levels, *grades 3 and 4, 3rd grade* (hyphenate *3rd-grader*); and Pages, *page 2*.

**D** Use the apostrophe with Singular possessives (the PTA's state office); Plural possessive nouns not ending in "s" (children's books); Plural possessive nouns ending in "s" (Unit PTAs' collaboration); but *Not* with plural nouns, figures (PTAs advocated important arts education legislation in the 2000s.)

**W** *Quotation marks are* always set outside the comma and the period; always inside the colon and the semicolon; and outside or inside the exclamation point, depending on whether the marks belong to the quoted matter. Use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations. A quoted passage of four lines or more may be used

without quotation marks if indented from the body of material. Use quotation marks for titles of songs, articles, periodicals, and lectures. "California Here I Come." Use quotation marks for themes, such as for conventions, workshops, or administrations. *"everychild. onevoice."*

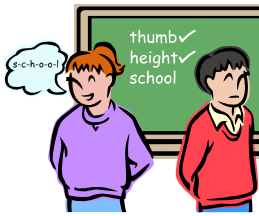
**■** Use a colon only if the introductory phrase can stand alone as a sentence. Do not use a colon after a verb.

**■** Capitalize the first word after a colon if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence. For a vertical list, capitalize the first word of each item; use commas or semi-colons with a final period if the phrases are lengthy.

**■** Use semicolons to separate elements of a series when the individual elements contain information that is set off by commas, or to join two clauses when a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for) is not present.

**;** Use a comma before the conjunction when the series of items or phrases are complicated or lengthy. The flag is red, white and blue. Use a comma with: Names of states and nations used with cities - *Los Angeles, California*; Dates that use month, day, and year - *October 30, 2002* (A comma is not required when date is omitted: June 2002.).

**STYLE NOTES** **Use:** Active tenses, not passive; Verbs, not adverbs; 4:00 p.m., noon, and midnight; Chairman, not chair or chairperson; People, not persons; Education reform, not educational reform; Parent involvement, not parental involvement; Either Dr. Jane Jones or Jane Jones, Ed.D., not Dr. - Jane Jones, Ed.D.; United States as a noun, U.S. as adjective. **Rewrite** to avoid *etc., and/or, he/she, s/he*. **Include** the year of passage with the names of all laws except those passed in the current legislative session.



## PTA Spelling List of Often-Used Words

after-school programs	handout (noun)	playground
at-risk	hand out (verb)	preschool
back-to-school	health-care clinics	preteen
bylaws	HIV/AIDS	PTA (no periods)
California State PTA	Honorary Service Award	PTSA (no periods)
(do not use CSPTA)	kindergartner	Reflections Program
California State PTA	latchkey	reproducible
Convention	Mission Statement of the	school-based
caregiver	California State PTA	schoolteacher
citywide	National PTA	seat belt
Continuing Service Award	(do not use NPTA)	self-esteem
curricula (plural)	nationwide	“SMARTS: Bring Back the
curriculum (singular)	noncommercial	Arts!”
day care (noun)	nonpartisan	statewide
day-care (adjective)	nonprofit	teenage/teenager
dropout	nonsectarian	T-shirt
DVD	online	vice president
e-mail	outreach	videocassette
extracurricular	Parent Teacher Association	Washington, D.C.
fund raiser (verb)	Parent Teacher Student	website
fund-raising activities	Association	well-being
fundraiser (noun)	<i>Parents Empowering</i>	worksheet
Golden Oak Service Award	<i>Parents (PEP) Guide</i>	year-round

### For More Information:

Strunk, William Jr., and E.B.White. *The Elements of Style* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 2000).

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

### PTA Resources:

National PTA website: [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

Articles: [www.pta.org/parent\\_resources.html](http://www.pta.org/parent_resources.html)

California State PTA website: [www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org)

(Information adapted from the California State PTA *Toolkit*, 6.2.5a and b, page 268.)

## WEBSITES

When designing your website, remember that **LESS IS MORE**. Think carefully about the strategic design and content of the site. Navigational design and planning are the most important step in site development. Consider how the site is structured, how users can and will access the information they need. Take the following suggestions into consideration.

***Plan for maintenance.*** If there are funds allocated for the website, don't spend your entire budget on the initial development.

***Plan with a purpose.*** Every page on your website should have a reason for being. The quality of each page determines by how well it will serve its purpose.

***Determine your host.*** Perhaps your website will be hosted through a county office of

education, the school district or funded by the PTA. Get bids from at least three service providers.

***Determine website construction.*** Will it be done commercially or by a PTA volunteer?

√ Forward edited copy via computer disk or email by the deadline date

√ Send a sample hard copy so instructions are clear

√ Keep a back-up disk of the copy submitted

√ Beta test prior to posting

Other considerations:

Links to California State PTA and National PTA website information are usually more cost and time effective than repeating the same material.

It is recommended that written permission be obtained prior to posting any name, photograph, home telephone number, or private email address on a website.

## E-NEWSLETTERS

E-newsletters are a timely and cost effective way to share pertinent and changing information with a large group of people. A typical e-newsletter is an information update sent via e-mail to members of an electronic mailing list.

When sending an e-newsletter, be sure to use "text-only" format. HTML-formatted newsletters and e-mail are incompatible with some e-mail systems and, in some cases, overload the user's system. Additionally there are some e-mail users

who will automatically ignore or delete HTML-formatted messages.

If your PTA has a website, a good e-newsletter is an easy way to promote the site and generate new users. Keep the e-newsletter brief and provide short summaries of new information available on your site. Include links to specific pages being discussed. This allows the reader to get a preview and jump to the linked site easily if desired.