

PTA vs. PTO: What's the Difference

How are PTA/PTSA and PTO groups structured?

The main difference is that a Parent Teacher (Student) Association (PTA/PTSA) is affiliated with the national and state PTA, and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is not. A PTO operates independently and does not have a parent organization.

Do both groups require membership dues?

PTA groups allocate a small percentage of their annual dues to the state and national PTA organizations to support education initiatives that benefit all children. However, *all parents* are welcome to participate in activities and events, even if they do not pay membership dues.

PTO groups also charge membership dues, but unlike PTA groups, they are not required to. Each PTO decides how much they will charge for member dues, so costs and how dues are allocated will vary each year from PTO to PTO.

How do the missions of PTA and PTO groups differ?

PTA units develop their own priorities, fundraising goals and programs specific to their school community, while also supporting the National PTA mission to make Every Child's Potential a Reality and supporting the whole child – the health, education and welfare of all children.

PTO units also develop their own mission and priorities, but do not have the dual purpose of supporting education at the district, state or national levels. In general, PTO groups tend to focus primarily on fundraising and less on other programs or education initiatives.

What are the benefits of being a PTA?

PTA provides a **collective voice for advocacy at the district, state and national level** that speaks much louder than individual PTOs. PTA is involved with passing laws to help all children including advocating for fully-funded education and anti-bullying programs and helping homeless youth and special needs/at-risk children. PTA also:

- **Provides guidelines & best practices.** Washington State PTA provides guidelines and trainings for how to effectively run meetings, elect officers, manage money, develop standing rules, etc., and meet the fiduciary requirements for non-profit organizations.
- **Provides training for PTA leaders and members.** PTA provides leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively serve their community, from [local training and conferences](#) to [e-learning opportunities](#).
- **Offers grants.** PTA provides grants to PTA groups for art, training, engagement, leadership and family outreach. See information about grants available to Seattle PTA on the [Seattle Council PTA Grants Page](#).
- **Supports the arts.** PTA supports learning the arts in schools through programs like the [National Reflections Program](#), which encourages participation from students of all ages and abilities.
- **Provides student scholarships & volunteer recognition.** WSPTA provides [awards and recognition](#) for outstanding educator and advocates. The "Golden Acorn" recognition pins help fund student scholarships in the state of Washington.
- **Provides member discounts.** There are many benefits available to PTA members. See the [Member Benefits & Discounts page](#).

What is the role of Seattle Council PTSA?

Some of the larger school districts, like Seattle, also have a PTA Council. Seattle Council PTSA (SCPTSA) is run by elected volunteer board members. Council members participate in district meetings and task forces and keep local units and the community informed of news, events and issues going on at the district, state and national levels through email communications, newsletters, their website and social media. SCPTSA also organizes meetings and training opportunities for the 80+ PTA groups in the district, providing them with community support to share information and leverage each other's ideas and programs. [Read more about SCPTSA here.](#)