



#TakeBackPTA

A RESOLUTION by the Seattle Council PTSA

Part 1

For more than 120 years, National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA®) has worked toward bettering the lives of every child in education, health and safety. Founded in 1897 as the National Congress of Mothers, it was renamed National Congress of Parents and Teachers (National PTA), then in 1970 merged with the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT)—founded by Selena Sloan Butler in Atlanta, Ga. in 1911— to serve all children.

As the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the nation, PTA has a strong track record as a voice for children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. Through advocacy, as well as family and community education, National PTA has established programs and called for legislation that improves our children’s lives:

- Creation of Kindergarten classes
- Child labor laws
- Public health service
- Hot and healthy lunch programs
- Children’s health and safety
- Arts in Education
- School Safety
- Special Education
- Education Funding
- Early Childhood Education

In recent decades, however, divergence from these foci has increased exponentially.

“Parent fundraising has become more important as state and local funds have dwindled,” said Robert Reich, a former U.S. secretary of labor and now a political science professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who advocates for policies to close the gap between rich and poor¹. In fact, revenue from school-supporting nonprofits—PTAs, PTOs, alumni

¹

<https://edsource.org/2014/how-budget-cuts-and-pta-fundraising-undermined-equity-in-san-francisco-public-schools/63488>

associations, booster clubs, school foundations and local endowments—increased nearly 350 percent from 1995 to 2010² and this trend has continued such that “in 2013-14, the 50 richest PTAs raised nearly \$43 million.”

Given that a substantial [body of research](#) indicates that “parent involvement at home and school is an important factor in improving young children’s literacy and math skills” and that “PTA membership was also associated with student achievement in a 2006 *School Community Journal* [study](#) authored by researchers at the University of West Florida” the shift represents a major disservice to our communities.

Moreover, in PTAs with fundraising programs of scale, the relationship between building administration and school community is no longer one of authentic engagement and collaboration but instead one of grant-making and seeking. As such, “If the principal knows that the PTA is not a source for fundraising, depending on the principal they might not go to the PTA and ask parents if [a particular project] is a priority.” When they do depend on family contributions, “parent engagement in gentrifying schools shows that schools tends to accommodate those [wealthy] parents’ interests and concerns³” rather than addressing needs equitably.

The school’s biggest benefactors are likely to assume that their giving affords them greater influence. In some sense, it does, because of the fiduciary responsibility granting organizations (PTAs, PTOs, School Foundations) have to ensure their funds are spent for their intended purpose. The result is families to whom staff and administrators are effectively operating as employees. Additionally, families feel like “ATMs” and interactions around family engagement are deeply tainted by monetary relationships. In Seattle, this is increasingly difficult to manage ethically and is, in many cases, in violation of School District policy and union collective bargaining.

Meanwhile, as this dynamic grows, PTA involvement is viewed by families as *primarily* a fundraising program intended for the wealthier and therefore influential families, leaving most other parents feeling disenfranchised, driven out, or never engaged. Even those that do have means quickly burn out due to the intensity of the fundraising machine. The result is waning participation and membership in PTA locally, statewide, nationally⁴. The massive decline is due to a broad array of factors but most can most succinctly be explained by the shift from building community to support children toward building treasuries. Simply put—it doesn’t feel valuable or relevant to the interests of many families.

² <https://districtadministration.com/k12-fundraising-fairness/>

³

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/how-marginalized-families-are-pushed-out-of-ptas/491036/>

⁴ Membership plummeted in the late '60s and 1970s, in part because of the racial rifts caused by school desegregation, then stabilized. But it has dropped steadily over the past 10 years from about 6 million to under 5 million. https://www.nj.com/news/2012/04/pta_membership_experiencing_st.html

Another victim of this shift is our community-based organizations (CBOs), which are sustainable, fully-staffed nonprofit organizations that provide important services and advocacy for our children's health safety and education. "As nonprofit organizations struggle to survive and compete to raise funds, even the local school fundraiser can be seen as competition for dollars." Schools fundraise for staff, playgrounds, and enrichment while the YMCA, who provides the after-school program at the same school, can't meet its fundraising goals. "Are we all in this together, or is it everyone for themselves?"⁵ is the question on the minds of our community partners who are struggling to survive.

Part 2

As Seattle Council PTSA, we envision a PTA that refocuses and rededicates itself to become that voice for children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education.

We must:

Refocus: The primary function of PTA is child advocacy. PTA is **not** a fundraising organization. The primary emphasis in PTA should be the promotion of the PTA mission, and activities and business of the PTA should serve to further the mission.

PTA Mission: The overall purpose of PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by **engaging and empowering families** and communities to **advocate** for all children.

Build Community and Engagement: Units and councils must recognize that the time and energy of its members are limited and must be harnessed by *meeting families where they are*. Be a resource for families and staff, and bring them together equitably and representatively. Allow for a wide variety of ways for families to contribute in their school community and for staff to feel part of that community.

Balance in Fundraising: The real working capital of a PTA lies in its members, not in its treasury. Follow the 3:1 rule - at least three non-fundraising projects aimed at helping parents and children or advocacy to every one fundraising event. In every area of children's well-being, PTAs carry successful programs of service and action on modest budgets.

Mind the gap: We must address the ways in which PTAs work within school communities to engage in addressing funding gaps, and how they solve some issues and create others. PTAs should create their annual budgets with specific goals in mind and identify strategies for reaching those goals equitably before determining the dollar amount needed in a fundraising event. Only those funds necessary to meet PTA's basic organizational needs, along with a nominal

⁵ <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2018/03/21/equity-questions-school-based-fundraising/>

operational cushion, should be raised. PTAs should not exacerbate inequities in a school district by excessive fundraising. Our funds are not meant to replace funds not supplied by governments; our funds are for the needs and operation of our organization and mission, for supporting participation on committees, for projects and programs that engage families, and advocacy for kids.

Community Partnership: Assist and grow those CBOs working in our school communities and District so as not to duplicate efforts. Support *their* fundraising efforts and partner with them. These organizations do exist primarily for the purpose of raising funds for the needs of children and youth, and to employ sufficient staff to meet those needs. They deserve the support and partnership of our members, units, and councils who can also serve to ensure their accountability to community.

Support sustainability: PTAs, as highly variable volunteer organizations, are not consistent or sustainable sources of building funds and cannot reliably ensure ongoing funding for educational programs or staff among other annual costs. Support organizations and programs that are.

ADVOCATE: Give members voice and provide resources for advocacy. **Advocate** for increased funding through the state legislative process and for equitable application of funding in your school community. If local PTAs and PTOs continue to purchase items for schools that should be provided by our state legislature through the tax system (public funds), the legislature will never see the need to provide an equitable, sustainable source of funding for public schools, and funding gaps between schools and districts will continue.

Local example: PTAs, via participation in Building Leadership Teams (BLTs) and advocacy for such participation, must insist upon a transparent reporting process for accepting outside funds into individual school budgets. This includes consolidating acceptance of funds and/or reporting whether as grants or deposits into “self-help” under the same “grant application” process.

There is no list from either the PTA or the IRS of what PTAs can and cannot fund. So while PTA/PTSAs have autonomy to make such decisions for themselves (as approved by their members) they must be aware that nonprofit, tax-exempt status of the PTA might be affected by actions outside of PTA mission and vision.

Local unit PTA leadership must encourage and support activities that demonstrate ethical alignment with its own mission and vision as stated at the time of nonprofit incorporation, membership affiliation, or risk losing tax exempt status, one of the most important PTA assets. Strict compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws is extremely important to prevent even the most well-intentioned effort from becoming a serious problem for a PTA. IRS website: www.irs.gov, the [National PTA Money Matters Quick Reference Guide](#).

Part 3

Seattle specific guidance.

The landscape in Seattle Public Schools warrants specific attention to the following topics and issues that arise while fundraising for contribution to Seattle Public Schools (which is again, not the central function of any PTA). Seattle Council PTSA provides the following guidance:

- Seattle Public Schools has policies which govern how grants and other funding come to SPS and school buildings. Some policies and procedures are consistent with PTA mission and vision, while others support and allow for a broader and deeper funding relationship inconsistent with PTA purpose and PTA/IRS etc. reporting requirements. PTA purpose, bylaws, mission and vision must take precedence when there is a conflict.
- Seattle Public Schools Board Policy, (ex. 6114), on Gifts, Grants, Donations and Fundraising Proceeds must be adhered to. PTAs must confirm grants that are accepted by SPS are reported both in the building budget and District grants inventory as designated by funder tax id number. *As well, PTA grants to Seattle Public Schools should be provided using a consistent set of budget categories designated by SPS so as to ensure transparent aggregation of dollars contributed at the district level.*
- Funds deposited into building “self-help” accounts, though allowed by SPS policy, are not traceable once deposited. This is not considered an appropriate use of funds if buildings and district accounting systems are unable to transparently demonstrate and acknowledge a) acceptance of such funds and b) confirmed use of such funds.
- The Seattle Public School “Gold Book” provides principals with budgeting guidance and restrictions. These should not be waived for the purposes of receiving PTA funds unless a case can be made for equity, supported by the SPS Equity Tiers and Toolkit. For example, spending on hourly tutors must not exceed the cost of a 0.5 IA per the Gold Book.
- Individual PTAs should readily make budgets available to membership, council and Seattle Public School to ensure transparent and inclusive budgeting.
- PTA funds should rarely, if ever be used to provide any salary for school staff or curriculum. While there will be times when critical exceptions to this occur, it should not be without specific consideration of the aforementioned commitment to mission and advocacy.

To this end:

Whereas Seattle Council PTSA is comprised of each local PTA, as an entity, in its designated area; is organized under the authority of the WSPTA and consists of local PTAs with the duty to promote the purposes of WSPTA; to provide services, information, support, and leadership training for local PTAs in their area; to uphold WSPTA policies and subscribe to the WSPTA Uniform Bylaws; and to promote cooperation among the local PTAs and encourage projects promoting children's health, safety, welfare and/or education in the local PTAs and the community.

Whereas A local PTA or council affiliated with the Washington State PTA (WSPTA) promotes the purposes of the National PTA and is willing to uphold WSPTA policies and subscribe to the WSPTA Uniform Bylaws as voted on by the members. Furthermore, the standing rules of the local PTA or council lay out the specific information and business practices that represent the culture and needs of that particular PTA.

Whereas the Washington State PTA (WSPTA) is a constituent association of the National PTA. In accordance with this affiliation, the WSPTA shall adhere to the vision and mission of National PTA as well as applicable bylaws, policies and legislative principles.

Therefore, Seattle Council PTSA shall educate local PTAs about fundraising best practices.

Therefore, Seattle Council PTSA shall encourage local PTAs to evaluate their current fundraising practices and budgets to focus on the mission of PTA and no longer fund parts of basic education that should be funded by the state.

Therefore, Seattle Council PTSA shall advocate to the state legislature to effectively raise revenue to amply fund education.

Therefore, Seattle Council PTSA shall advocate for reasonable and equitable fundraising policies for all parent organizations in Seattle Public Schools.

Therefore, be it resolved that Seattle Council PTSA shall support and encourage local PTA focus on advocacy and community and family engagement.

Fundraising of scale serves only as a distraction from the important work of advocacy and exacerbates critical inequities in our system that will only be remedied by collective pressure on our state legislature and school board to effectively raise revenue and deploy funds toward that end. We urge our current and future members to **#TakeBackPTA** and return to a commitment to community, family and advocacy.

ADOPTED by Seattle Council PTSA at a regular open general membership meeting thereof,
held **April 1, 2019**.

SCPTSA President: Chandra Hampson