

Fourth District Legislative Advocacy Communicator



FOURTH DISTRICT ADVOCACY TEAM

SEPTEMBER 2010

November Elections

How can you help your community participate in the election process?

An important responsibility for your PTA is to encourage the citizens of your local community to become educated, engaged voters who participate in our local, state, and federal elections. Voter turnout in California elections is particularly low among parents of young children, so anything you do to boost participation can really make a difference. Here are some ideas, guidelines, and resources to assist you in this process.

Give your voters the basics

Let your PTA members know what they need to do and when they need to do it. Publish deadlines for vote-by-mail applications and voter registration in your PTA newsletter. Distribute voter registration forms at events that can be mailed in to your county's Registrar of Voters. Post a reminder about Election Day and poll hours in your school's bulletin, or put up signs encouraging citizens to vote on Election Day.

Help your voters become educated

You can offer basic voter information by providing a link to the California Secretary of State's official election website at www.sos.ca.gov. Another option is to distribute neutral, non-partisan voter information through the League of Women Voter's *Easy Voter Guide* project; see www.easyvoter.org for details.

Let them meet the candidates

An effective way to engage your community and demonstrate the value of your PTA is to host a candidates' forum. The forum allows concerned parents and other voters an opportunity to become better informed about their choices for elected representatives.

While IRS regulations prevent tax-exempt organizations like PTAs from supporting or opposing candidates, they do allow such organizations to host nonpartisan candidates' forums as an acceptable form of voter education. Forums allow candidates for public office to express their views openly so audience members can understand their positions and make informed voting choices. The forum must allow each

Calendar of Events

Advocacy Roundtable:

Friday, September 24, 9:30-11:00 a.m.
OC Department of Education Bldg. D-1001
(200 Kalmus Drive, Costa Mesa, CA)

2011 Sacramento Safari:

- Monday, March 21 – Tuesday, March 22
Be sure to include this line item in your budget!

California's November 2nd General Election:

- Applications to vote-by-mail must be received by the Registrar of Voters by 5 pm on October 26th.
- Last day to register to vote in this election is October 18th.
- Election Day: Polls will be open from 7 am to 8 pm on Tuesday, November 2nd.
 - ▶ Orange County Registrar of Voters – See www.ocvote.com for local election details.
 - ▶ For California's Official Voter Information Guide, see www.sos.ca.gov.

invited candidate an equal and fair opportunity to express his or her position on issues. Possible formats include candidate speeches, a panel discussion, and/or an audience question-and-answer session. Visit the California State PTA website for more information at http://www.pta.org/hosting_a_candidates_forum.asp, or contact the Fourth District Advocacy Team for help with your event: advocacy@fourthdistrictpta.org.

Ask on behalf of your members

Alternatively, a candidate questionnaire requires fewer resources and still allows concerned parents and other voters to become better informed about their choices for an elected representative. When hosting a forum or publishing replies to a questionnaire, it is important to make sure every candidate is given an equal opportunity to answer each question.

Speak to the issues

PTA does take positions on issues that affect children and youth. One of the purposes of PTA is to secure adequate laws for children and youth – this means law-

making at all levels, including ballot measures. It is PTA's responsibility to disseminate as much factual, objective information as possible during election campaigns to help the community make informed choices.

Ballot measures include ballot initiatives, constitutional amendments, bond measures, and referenda. PTAs cannot support or oppose candidates for public office, but they can engage in limited lobbying activity to urge voters to support or oppose particular ballot measures.

A position adopted by the California State PTA on a statewide measure is the official PTA position for all PTA districts, councils, and units. Therefore, any local unit, council, or district PTA may participate in the campaign in support of the PTA position without a vote or other formal action by their local PTA board or association.

If the State PTA has taken a position on a ballot measure, local PTA units are strongly encouraged, but not required, to work actively for the PTA position. A PTA unit, council, or district may not take action in opposition to the position.

Want to do more?

Some things PTAs can do in election campaigns are to publicize campaign issues through use of e-mail, telephone trees, and mailings to members; provide speakers to present the PTA position at meetings held by PTA; distribute campaign materials in public places or door-to-door; or write letters to the editor of your local newspaper. Additionally, the PTA may provide volunteers to work phone banks or assist in other activities at the campaign headquarters.

What CAN'T you do?

PTA does have some strict limitations on what it cannot do regarding election advocacy. Due to IRS restrictions, PTA associations cannot do any of the following:

- Endorse candidates or a political party for public office.
- Invite only one candidate or political party in an election to speak at a PTA meeting or event.
- Ask candidates to sign pledges on any issue (tacit endorsement).
- Tell PTA members to only vote for a candidate who supports "X" position.
- Distribute any campaign materials on behalf of a candidate, or allow campaign materials at PTA meetings.

Ask the Advocacy Team

If you have any questions concerning advocacy issues, please contact us at: advocacy@fourthdistrictpta.org.

Key PTA Links

www.fourthdistrictpta.org – Click on **Advocacy**
www.capta.org – Select from menu: **Programs and Services: Advocacy** and **Children's Issues: Legislation**
www.pta.org – Click on **Take Action**

Allow anyone to wear candidates' campaign buttons or t-shirts during a PTA meeting..

Remember: As tax exempt organizations, PTAs may not support or oppose any political party or candidate, including those running for school boards and on nonpartisan slates. Participation or intervention in partisan or candidates' political campaigns will endanger the organization's nonprofit status with the IRS.

Additional guidelines

As you consider your election options, recognize the distinction between information pieces and advocacy pieces:

Advocacy urges action; advocacy is persuasive. A flyer such as "Vote YES on Measure D!" may be handed out at PTA meetings, distributed on the sidewalk (not school grounds), or mailed home. It must not be sent home with children – even in a PTA newsletter.

Information is evenhanded and dispassionate. For example, the statement that "The California State PTA has taken a position opposing Proposition 989" is a piece of information that can be reported without being considered as advocacy. Information may be distributed in the above listed ways and also sent home with kids, *subject to the approval of the principal.*

Note that the location of any PTA meeting – even one held on school grounds, if a facility use agreement is signed – is considered a private space, so that restrictions on issue-related political activity do not apply within the meeting.

A last word to PTA leaders

PTA asks its leaders not to use their PTA titles in any personal endorsements of candidates for office. For example, on an endorsement list, use "Jane Jetson, parent leader" and not "Jane Jetson, Spacely Elementary PTA President." Also note that although no organization can abridge your right to political activity as an individual, you should consider carefully how close involvement or association in a campaign will affect your ability to lead your PTA effectively.