

## How To Be A Legislative Chair

Advocacy has been the cornerstone of PTA since our founding in 1897 and remains the primary focus today. Many major landmark policies for children such as child labor laws, the Juvenile Justice system and hot school lunches, are examples of PTA advocates pushing for reform. Of course changes doesn't take place overnight. Advocacy is often a gradual process. It requires patience and year-to-year efforts. Most of all it requires advocacy remains a primary focus not only at the National and State level but also the local unit level. It is the job of the legislative chair to both inform and encourage advocacy by all our members.

This guide was created to serve as a guide assist you with your Legislative Chair duties throughout the school year.

### When you first become a Legislative Chair:

- Send your email and contact information to the state office. This will ensure you are added to the Legislative Chair email list.
- Sign up for the JC/DC network.
- Ask your president for the unit/council copy of the Missouri Legislative Handbook. There is an electronic copy on 'Advocacy Resource' section of the Missouri PTA website.
- Familiarize yourself with the 'Legislative' tab of the [MOPTA.org](http://MOPTA.org) site and the 'Public Policy' tab of the [PTA.org](http://PTA.org) site – bookmark them!

### Training:

No one expects you to know everything. There are a variety of trainings available throughout the year and online to help you feel more comfortable in this position.

- PTA webinars or E-learning Modules are available under the 'Running a PTA' tab of [PTA.org](http://PTA.org)
- School of Information
- Convention (both Missouri PTA and National PTA)
- Regional Leadership conferences
- PTA Legislative Conference – national training in the D.C. area that concludes with a day lobbying on Capitol Hill

### Monthly Duties:

Legislative reports at unit meetings and articles for newsletters. The MOPTA Legislative Department produces a monthly (September – May) suggested legislative report. This report will provide you with local, state and national information. Utilize this report to create your own report by cutting and pasting information. A basic report template is available on the 'Advocacy Resource' page located in the Legislation section of the Missouri PTA website. You can also submit information from the suggested report to your unit newsletter or announcements.

### Elections:

There are two main elections during the school year. They are both held on the first Tuesday of their respective months.

- November is the general election. Legislators at the state and federal level are elected at this time and state propositions are brought before the voters.
- April is the school board election. This is generally the same time school bonds and levies are brought before the voters.

Because of the PTA's 501(c)(3) status there are IRS restrictions PTAs must observe when it comes to elections. PTA's cannot be part of PACs (Political Action Committee) and they cannot support or oppose candidates. However there are many things your PTA can do to promote advocacy during elections.

- Host voter registration tables
- Encourage member to register and vote
- Host or cohost student mock elections
- Support or oppose propositions – these must fall in line with PTA mission, purposes, resolutions and positions
- Support school bond and levy issues
- Host candidate forums – all candidates must be invited to participate
- Publish candidate questionnaires – all candidates must be invited to participate and answers must be published as received from the candidates

### Legislation

Missouri Regular Legislative session runs from January (the first Wednesday after the first Monday) through May 30<sup>th</sup>. The last day to consider bills is the first Friday after the second Monday in May. Legislators can start pre-filing bills on December 1<sup>st</sup>.

- The Missouri Legislative Department posts a bill watch list beginning in December on the 'Capitol Chatter' page of the website.
- JC/DC alerts are issued when action on a bill is pending.
- Encourage members to sign up the JC/DC alerts.
- Pass alerts on to members through your own email network.
- Provide your membership with the names and contact information for your legislative representatives at the state and federal level.
- Provide members with copies of the "Communicating with Legislators" and "Advocacy is for All Members".
- Hold a Kid's First Town Hall – The Legislative Department works with local unit/councils to host Kid's First Town Hall events. Each year the Legislative Department develops a list of Town Hall questions. These questions can be modified to fit your area's needs.
- Communicate with your superintendent and local teachers' associations in an effort to gather information on education legislative issues in your district and work towards mutual legislative goals.
- Invite representatives to a local meeting to speak regarding PTA priorities and concerns.
- Pass along the Legislative Priorities to your state representatives and senators along with a letter from your unit.
- Show appreciation to those legislators who support PTA positions. Build an ongoing relationship with your legislators. It is easier to ask for something from a friend than a stranger. It is also easier if you don't only call when you need something.

### Child Advocacy Day

Hosted by the Missouri Alliance for Children, Youth and Families, this is a statewide event held annually during either the month of March or April. In addition to advocacy training, attendees have the opportunity to visit personally with their state legislators. The Missouri Legislation & Advocacy Department hosts a booth at this event.

### Atlaw award

This award is given to individuals and units/councils to recognize their advocacy efforts. Atlaw is a great guide to use to assist with advocacy efforts.