

PALO ALTO PTA COUNCIL

GUIDELINES FOR PARENT NETWORK COMMUNICATIONS

What are Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) Parent Networks?

Parent Networks are grade-level closed groups for parents and guardians to continue to build community and share constructive ideas about parenting and topics related to our students' day-to-day experience at our schools.

Who can be involved?

All parents and guardians who seek a supportive and safe peer group discussion with others in their grade level regarding their children's social emotional and academic development are encouraged to join.

What is the purpose of each Parent Network?

The purpose of the Parent Network Electronic Group is for the PTA/PTSA moderators to **push out** information that is grade level specific and other timely information.

The purpose of a Parent Network in-person meeting is widening circles of community and support. Parent Network meetings are organized by PTA/PTSA Parent Network Coordinators and provide an opportunity for parents to share ideas, concerns and constructive strategies around issues such as student friendships, parent-child communication, emerging independence, discipline and social life (dating, parties, etc.) Usually this exchange is through informal in person discussions. Some groups may invite a speaker to meetings from time to time. These meetings should be a "safe space" for dialogue and preferentially are held at a neutral, accessible campus location as many parents feel uncomfortable attending home meetings.

Parent Network Coordinators and Moderators must be PTA/PTSA members in good standing and follow California PTA Toolkit guidelines as well as PTAC Parent Network guidelines. They will report to the Vice President of Communications and/or the PTA/PTSA President.

This forum is NOT a channel to air personal grievances, promote political candidates or advocate for-profit endeavors.

PUSH Electronic Communication Groups

These groups operate on a moderated one-way or PUSH basis. The grade level PTA/PTSA Parent Network moderators can subscribe parent email addresses given by the school district to PTAs under a process defined by the PTA Council. Parents can always opt-out if they desire after receiving a group email. Each group is typically staffed with 2 or more moderators, who:

- Establish and moderate an online group (usually either Google Groups, UpToUs or Yahoo Groups). Only moderators distribute communications.
- Send pertinent information to members through the online group. This can be in the form of reminders for school or PTA/PTSA information, events, notes from meetings, et al. Best efforts are to be made to send comprehensive messaging rather than multiple, small messages on a given topic.

A best practice is to make available an electronic feedback form (like a google form) to allow members to privately (with the option of anonymity) voice issues and/or concerns to the PTA/PTSA moderator who can then direct these to the appropriate PTA or school administrator(s) to address. This gives parents a way to voice concerns and be heard, in a safe, positive and constructive way.

A best practice is for PTA/PTSA Presidents and Communications VPs to join all Parent Network grade level groups with moderator privileges. This helps PTA/PTSA Presidents and Communications VPs know what is being communicated. Postings may be made by PTA Presidents and/or Communications VPs as needed.

Rules

The rule for online submissions and in person discussion group content is that it be school-related, appropriate, fact based, constructive and as comprehensive as possible; and that discussions are respectful, feel "safe" and are productive.

Refrain from discussing:

- Individuals – district/school staff, teachers, parents, students
- For-profit endeavors
- Political issues or candidates (unless approved by the Palo Alto PTA Council)
- Intense personal situations or proprietary information
- Want-ads (housing, items, etc.)

Contact the PTA/PTSA VP of Communications and/or the PTA/PTSA President before sending out messages that address an intense or significant topic to the school community.

Why contact the PTA/PTSA VP of Communications or President?

- The PTA/PTSA VP of Communications is a central point of contact and coordinates messaging across grade lists and will likely have significant updates from the PTA/PTSA President, the school, the district and/or students; they may already have valuable experience and expertise in the matter.
- The PTA/PTSA President is the PTA/PTSA point of contact for school and district staff as well as parents and students and may have facts that need to be added or updated in any messaging as well as including input on the most effective message timing.
- The PTA/PTSA is a team that works together. Sharing messaging solutions on an intense or significant topic to the school community means there are no mixed messages. By working together, we can have healthy and helpful messaging going out.

I want to A-D-V-O-C-A-T-E!

- PTA/PTSAs are child advocacy organizations. However, PTA/PTSAs bylaws require that advocacy positions must be voted on before a person can proceed to advocate as a PTA/PTSA member and representative. Advocacy positions must not countermand 6th district or state positions.
- PTA/PTSAs can educate membership on how to effectively advocate for children including, but not limited to, understanding Education Code and working with schools, districts, Boards of Education and state legislatures to effect change.
- The PTA/PTSA does not support hate groups and their behaviors.

Moderators approve posts to ensure compliance with above rules.

Peer-to-Peer Electronic Communication Groups OPT-IN ONLY

- PTA/PTSA email lists CANNOT be used to directly populate/invite membership to an OPT-IN peer-to-peer communication group.
- These groups will not be moderated/supported with volunteer resources of the PTA/PTSA.

- Advertising a peer-to-peer OPT-IN group must be approved by the PTA/PTSA president.
- The announcement message to be sent out must be approved by the PTA/PTSA president.
- The message must be neutrally advertised in the grade level PUSH communications group.
- The message will not be a redirection to any moderators' own personal e-mail(s) or group(s).
- These groups should be transparent and accessible to grade level parents and guardians so as not to exclude community members.
- Advertisement should remind parents of rules of behavior including respect for parents, students and staff.

Meetings

Coordinate in person meetings to discuss relevant topics and/or socialize. Meetings are usually held every 4-6 weeks at the school or an accessible locale and can be informal discussion among parents, or more formal with guest speakers such as school staff, professionals with specific topics appropriate to the group, or sometimes joint meetings with the parent network group one grade above for advice at the end of the year. Parent Network meetings are not to be used as means of advertising for speakers/presenters.

Meetings should be "safe spaces" where all feel welcome and feel safe to speak. Many families are uncomfortable in a personal home site. When possible use neutral school spaces for these meetings.

If there is interest in a topic that could benefit the entire school please work with the VP of Parent Education to possibly make it a school wide event or intra-district event.

Recommend Parent Network coordinators and moderators meet with their predecessors before school year end. Meeting before the end of the year passes on valuable institutional knowledge while still fresh in people's memories.

Parent Network Coordinators need to check with PTA treasurer for budget allocated to cover costs of refreshments and speakers' fees and have their expenditures released and approved before they occur.

**From the California State PTA Toolkit
May 2016 Page R52**

Suggested Posting Guidelines:

(This can be posted on any social media your PTA uses and allows comments from the public.)

Please follow these guidelines when commenting on our site:

Be Relevant: Stay on topic.

Be Respectful: Keep things civil. Avoid abusive or offensive language, threats, hate speech, libels and calls for violence. And don't make jokes about the misfortune of others.

Be Honest: Use your real name. Don't post commercial messages. Don't publish copyrighted material that belongs to someone else.

Be Discreet: Don't publish telephone numbers, addresses or other personal information about yourself or others.

Be Responsible: Think about what you write before posting. Users are solely responsible for what they post.

Questions or Comments :

Gabrielle Conway, communications@paloaltopta.org

VP of Communications

Palo Alto Council of PTAs