

Welcome to Team PTA

By Krista Wharton

When I was in middle school, I was a cheerleader. I loved cheering for my team, hoping my encouraging words, “Go, team, go!”, would help us score a victory. I still like to root for my favorite teams: the University of North Carolina Tar Heels and both my sons’ middle school and high school football teams. But the team I cheer for the most is Team PTA. And I don’t just cheer for the local PTAs at my sons’ schools; I cheer for all PTAs on the local, council, state, and national levels. When someone is a team player, they put team goals ahead of personal goals. When state and local PTAs work together for the benefit of our children, they are being Team PTA players.

But I wasn’t always a Team PTA player. I was a My School PTA player. I hate to admit this, but I was once a PTA president who didn’t see the value of PTA beyond her local unit. I didn’t attend the state convention or send anyone on our board to attend. I didn’t seek out those at my council or state PTAs for guidance or wisdom. It was all about my school, my PTA.

My fear is that there are too many local PTA presidents and members who feel the same way I did. What are some possible reasons? Local PTAs may see their state PTA and National PTA as just a group to which they have to pay membership dues without getting anything in return. They may not see the state PTA as a resource. Perhaps they are not attending their state convention or the National PTA convention because they do not perceive any value.

I have learned from experience that there is tremendous value for local leaders in working with state and National PTA. The conventions offer numerous workshops to attend, leadership training, and networking with other members across the state and the country to

share best practices and solve problems. Among the most valuable networking opportunities is the opportunity to meet your state and national board members in person and build relationships.

Many people do not or cannot attend the state or national convention because they are unable to get away from work or the children, or they just don’t have the money. We at Tennessee PTA are sensitive to these issues and have made the effort to reach out to our local leaders by offering summer leadership training (SLT) workshops to help build local-state PTA relationships and offer training opportunities to local unit leaders.

Our SLT team consists of the Tennessee PTA executive committee, which travels to six major cities throughout the state over the course of a week. This SLT training gives local unit board members the opportunity to meet state board members in person, network with other leaders in their region, and attend workshops to learn more about topics such as increasing membership, student programs, leadership development, and explanations of the PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. SLT also includes executive committee training for the local leaders. SLT has become an important tool in helping us build relationships with the local leaders.

Building local-state PTA relationships is especially important to our mutual goal of empowering families in all our states to help children succeed. According to Tennessee PTA President Karen Davis, “Our strength as advocates lies at the local PTA level. Each stakeholder brings their unique skill set and collective experiences to the table, and it is only by working together through the local, council, and state PTAs that we can harness that strength to create change.”

She adds, “We’re not here at the state level to hold a title. We’ve once been in their shoes (at the local level). Current and former state board leaders have a variety of expertise on different subjects and can be utilized to help provide training to local units.”

In addition to the training we provide, Tennessee PTA board members are encouraged to be available to local units in their region for a variety of purposes, such as speaking at meetings, helping to run membership tables, helping out at carnivals, or just answering questions. Says Ms. Davis, “We don’t always need to provide training. Support can come in many different ways.”

I felt encouraged recently when our local council president, Gayla Bolton, asked me to join her Johnson City Council board. She welcomed me as the state liaison to give updates from the state level at council meetings. Says Ms. Bolton, “We are very fortunate to have state PTA officers locally. That has not always been the situation for our area. We are able to stay connected and current, and learn what events are happening at another level of PTA. There is always more going on than we know. It is easy to remain focused on ourselves and our schools, but PTA is much broader in working for our children.”

The message we at Tennessee PTA try to convey to our local unit members is simple: We are here to support you! We are not the PTA police, looking to arrest you for filling out your reports incorrectly. We are a group of volunteers just like you who want to be a valuable resource to you as we all try to make a positive difference in the lives of our children. All state PTAs and National PTA are here to help local units succeed. We are on the same team...Team PTA. **OC**

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Moving Beyond My PTA – Some Benefits of the State and National PTAs:

- A source for leadership training and education.
- A system for networking with PTA leaders, who can act as a resource of knowledge and expertise in PTA programs and functions.
- A support system for empowering families on the local level.
- A resource for best practices and problem-solving.

PARENTS' GUIDE TO STUDENT SUCCESS



PTA Leaders – Help Parents Understand the
Common Core State Standards.

PTA.org/parentsguide
Available in
English and Spanish