

Tips on Getting a PTSA Started in Your School

To have a successful program, you need to let the students “own” it.

Find a Cause

- ♦ Follow the students’ interests and drive.
- ♦ Determine a cause: dress code, attendance, violence, traffic safety, etc.
- ♦ Decide on the desired results after a cause is chosen.
- ♦ Schedule regular meetings to discuss progress and activities.

Recruit

- ♦ Set out tables with information at back-to-school night or parent-teacher conferences. Give information out at school lunch.
- ♦ Prepare Public Service Announcements (PSAs) at school events, etc.
- ♦ Let students know what you want to achieve and solicit their help.
- ♦ Set out sign-up sheets and allow students to choose an area in which to serve. Ask teachers to recommend students who may otherwise be too shy to volunteer.
- ♦ Buy T-shirt and get membership free.
- ♦ Beginning of year stomp, get in free if you’re a member.
- ♦ Offer ‘freebies’ during the year: donuts, ice cream, etc.

Implement

- ♦ Let the students, teachers, parents, and community know of your plans and desired results.

Publicize

- ♦ Have the PTSA students write articles on activities for their school newspaper.
- ♦ Announce the program and solicit help on the school radio station, Channel One, or assemblies.

Activities that your PTSA could be involved in

- ♦ Try activities like: Ribbon week, graduation parties, Battle of the Bands (BOB), Advocacy Conference, Presidential Service Awards, Utah PTA Student Leadership Conference, Teen Dating Violence Awareness Week, etc.
- ♦ Let teachers and clubs know that PTSA is a resource to help with their activities.

Document

- ♦ Write articles and take pictures of your activities for newsletters, yearbook, bulletin boards, and PTA Awards.
- ♦ Keep a student leadership procedure book.

Putting the S in PTSA

A PTSA may be organized in several different ways. Local PTSA bylaws stipulate that at least one student be included on the adult board. How to structure a PTSA is a decision that can be made by each local school, and should be based on what the PTSA is intending to achieve. Decisions about the goals of your PTSA can be determined through needs assessments, surveys, or discussions with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. If your local organization is not currently a PTSA, there are simple steps to follow to form one. You may find that your school is already chartered as a PTSA, but the students haven't effectively been included in your organization.

When deciding how to organize and structure your PTSA, ask:

- ♦ “What do we want our students to gain from this experience?”
- ♦ “How can we include those who want to serve?”
- ♦ Students at this age have fabulous ideas. Talk to them. Listen to them before you decide how to set up your PTSA.

These Ideas May Be Used To Organize A PTSA

1. Arrange a meeting with students, parents, teachers, and administrators to discuss the benefits of organizing a PTSA. Discuss how the student organization might be structured. (See “Ideas on How to Structure a PTSA” on page 22.)
2. Determine what functions your PTSA will serve. Some of these may be to provide:
 - i) Leadership and/or service opportunities for students.
 - ii) Safe social events for students.
 - iii) A forum where students can discuss and solve social and educational problems.
 - iv) Assistance to the adult board in implementing PTA programs, events, etc.
 - v) Fun!
3. Notify students of an introductory meeting through announcements, notices in school paper, colorful posters, personal handwritten invitations, email, text messaging, other social media, etc. Involve the students. At the meeting, have students share personal experiences of PTSA positively impacting their school. Discuss needs, set goals, and make a plan to attain them. Call for a vote of the students on their desire to become PTSA members. Refer to your local PTSA bylaws for the timeframe of these meetings.
4. Enlist an advisor for the group. Get permission to hold meetings in a teacher's room. He/she could be the teacher representative on the student committee. If your student group meets outside of regular school hours, two adult leaders must be present, with no one-on-one student-adult situations, unless the student is their child.
5. Elect student leaders. Ensure that students are empowered to be part of PTSA. Encourage student leaders to take advantage of the leadership training available through Utah PTA, such as the PTSA Student Leadership Conference, Advocacy Conference, PTSA Student Day at the Capitol, etc.
6. Spark interest by utilizing bright PTSA logos on signs, newsletters, bulletin boards, etc. Create T-shirts for members and use comedy, music, drama, etc. to announce meetings and activities. Display photos of all activities on posters in the halls of the school.

How to Structure a PTSA

A PTSA must have student involvement with the adult PTSA. To provide even more opportunities to involve and develop student leaders, a Student PTSA Committee could also be formed. Make sure to follow local and district school policies concerning the creation of a student club or initiative.

Possible Ideas on How to Structure a PTSA Having a Student Committee

1. Student applications are taken and a certain number of students are selected to be on the Student PTSA Committee. These students represent the student membership as they plan and carry out PTSA programs and functions. (General student membership is included where possible.) One member of this committee sits on the adult board to facilitate communication.
2. Officers are elected by the student membership and have similar positions as the adult board. Since you can't have a Board within a Board, this is a Committee. You will have a Chair & Vice-Chair instead of President & President-Elect, and a Secretary, but no Treasurer – students do not handle money. They work hand in hand with the adult member of the board with the similar title.
3. The student committee may be made up from students who are recommended by teachers. One member from each homeroom class is selected to be on the Student PTSA Committee.
4. Where schools have both a student government and a Student PTSA Committee, a Student PTSA Committee member will meet with the student government to facilitate communication and coordination of activities.

Possible Ideas on How to Structure a PTSA Without Having a Student Committee

1. All PTSA offices are held by adults, but one of the student body officers is appointed as a representative to the PTSA. They act as a liaison between the board and the student government.
2. A student PTSA representative is elected as part of the student body election process. This student meets with the adult PTSA Board and acts as a liaison between that board and the student government.
3. A student PTSA representative is selected from the school's Peer Leadership Team (or similar group that doesn't include SBOs). This student meets with the adult PTSA Board and acts as a liaison between that board and the student government.
4. A student PTSA representative is nominated by the PTSA Nominations Committee. The student nominee can NOT be the child of anyone on the Nominations Committee.

Ideas on How to Structure a PTSA By Integrating Students With the Adult PTSA

1. Integrate the students right into the adult board. A student, for example, may serve as Health or Safety Commissioner. In this case, it is important to remember that Student Committee members cannot sign contracts or checks or handle money.
2. Officers have similar positions as the adult board. They work closely with the adult member of the Board with the similar title. Together they plan events and programs.
3. When having difficulty promoting student leadership, have a PTSA student leader selected by each teacher. They become the Student PTSA Committee and work hand-in-hand with the adult PTSA to learn leadership skills.

Note: Most of our PTSAs currently are set up as Student Boards, with Presidents, President-Elects, etc. As pointed out above, this practice needs to change. To help with this change, consider this comment from a student at the Utah PTA Student Leadership Committee meeting where this was discussed:

"A president is someone who can make decisions on their own. A chairman's job is to listen to their committee and keep them on task, doing the things that need doing."
