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# Washington State PTA

## Local Unit and Council Legislative Issues Survey

### *Suggested Guidelines -- August 2006/07*

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Each year, Washington State PTA develops a short-term legislative platform built with issues proposed by individual members, local units, and councils. These issues are debated and prioritized by the delegates at the annual Legislative Assembly. This short term platform determines which emergent issues that will be the focus during the next year. In order to be effective advocates, we need to know what issues are priorities for our members and the children they serve.

Through this process each PTA member has the opportunity to give input by taking part in a survey and every unit has the opportunity to give input by sending a delegate(s) to Legislative Assembly. This grassroots effort leads to a platform that is responsive to our members and reflects those issues our members deem to be the highest priority.

#### **SURVEY: Suggested Guidelines**

- Determine how your unit will survey your members. See below for information on survey formats.
- If you decide to use the WSPTA provided survey, copy the survey form and distribute. This word document allows you to add your own PTA information and instructions for returning the survey. If you decide to use a different format, you will need to create the survey.
- The surveys may be sent via "kid mail" after obtaining permission from the school principal. Remember to specify a due date on your surveys and also to set up a collection system to minimize disruption to the office staff.
- Collect the surveys and collate the results.
- Announce the results to your board of directors and members.
- Determine how the results will be used --
  - If you have a delegate(s) going to Legislative Assembly these survey results can only be used as guidance, as some issues will be voted off the platform prior to voting. This year there is an option for respondents to tag any issue with an "N" which means this issue should not be included on the final platform. Decide how your Legislative Assembly delegate will use this information – for example, if 50% of your survey show an "N" by an issue, your delegate could vote "no" on that issue during the "up/down" vote on each issue prior to prioritizing the final issues.
  - If you are not going to send a delegate to Legislative Assembly, consider letting your council legislative Chair or the Region Legislative Chair know the results of your survey. While they cannot cast your vote, they can convey any concerns you might have.
- If you use a survey format other than the one provided, you will need to determine how to translate the results you receive in such a way that your delegate(s) have clear direction as to how the unit wishes them to vote.
- If you have any questions during this process, contact your council legislative chair or your Region Legislative Chair (RLC). See FAQs below to find your RLC.
- This year's sample survey allows respondents to note if there are interested in attending Legislative Assembly, with space for contact information. If your slots are already full, or there isn't room in the budget for additional delegates you can easily delete this from the survey prior to printing.

#### **SURVEY: Various Formats**

Legislative Assembly format: Distribute the sample survey to your members and/or school community. Ask people to identify their top ten issues. A sample survey with this format is available on the WSPTA website ([www.wastatepta.org](http://www.wastatepta.org); click on "Legislation".)

YES/NO: Have your general membership vote on the issues "yes, this should be on the platform" or "no, this should not be on the platform" and then have them prioritize the issues they want to include.

Sticky Dot Voting: At a PTA meeting or event, have each member take 10 stickers (dots, stars, etc.). Have the issues posted on the wall and members may vote with their stickers however they would like. They can place all their stickers on one issue or spread them around accordingly.

Rank Order: Units can have members rank the issues from top priority to lowest (1-25).

Virtual Survey: Units can also choose to survey their members via e-mail or voice mail. If your PTA has online survey capabilities you may want to consider that option.

Survey by Categories: A unit can group issues into like categories and then have the members prioritize those categories.

NOTE: Each PTA must determine if they wish to only survey their members, or to survey their entire school community – all parents and staff. This decision is made by each PTA.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Who is my Region Legislative Chair and how do I contact him/her?**

Each region has a Region Legislative Chair to help members and units with the advocacy process. You can find the name and contact information for your RLC through your Region Director, your region newsletter, the region website page at [www.wastatepta.org](http://www.wastatepta.org) (click on “Regions”), or by contacting the WSPTA Legislative Director at [ptalegdir@wastatepta.org](mailto:ptalegdir@wastatepta.org).

### **How can I distribute the survey?**

The survey provided by WSPTA is “kid mail” friendly; however it must still be approved by the building principal prior to sending this to parents via students. Some principals may hesitate to send it out. If the principal has concerns, try to address those concerns. Keep in mind: the principal is the final decision maker regarding materials sent home with students. If you’d like further guidance with this issue, consult with your council or Region Legislative Chair.

### **Once we have the results, how do we determine how to vote at Legislative Assembly?**

If you use the WSPTA survey sample you will have a number of votes cast for each issue. You can then compile a list of your members’ priorities – one through twenty-five. Other survey methods can be more difficult to tally and you may need to make a judgment call. If you do make a judgment call, it is important to share that decision with your Board of Directors.

### **We did not get very many surveys back. How can we determine how to vote at Legislative Assembly?**

The question to ask is this -- did you receive a representative sample of your membership? If not, you might consider doing some sampling in person – interview different members and ask their opinions. You may also want to consider doing some surveying at a meeting in a different format.

### **Does our PTA’s legislative representative have to vote the results we get back?**

WSPTA strongly recommends that Legislative Representatives to Legislative Assembly use the survey results as guidance, and that they are allowed to use their best judgment based on what they have learned both from the surveys and discussion/debate at Legislative Assembly.

### **Our PTA doesn’t have a legislative representative. How can we make sure our voice is heard at Legislative Assembly?**

Your PTA may send any member to cast your vote at Legislative Assembly. Check your standing rules to determine your process for identifying your delegate to Legislative Assembly in the event you do not have a Legislative Representative. If your standing rules do not provide the needed guidance, your Board of Directors may want to appoint a delegate for Legislative Assembly.

### **My local unit does not want to survey the members – what can I do?**

Speak with your president and Board of Directors and find out why they don’t want to survey the members. Remind them of the importance of advocating for children and offer to coordinate the efforts to distribute the survey. If you need assistance, contact your council or region service delivery team. If no agreement is reached to widely distribute the surveys, an alternative would be to have the Board (as representatives of the membership) complete the survey.

### **Do I only survey PTA members?**

This is a decision for your PTA. Some PTAs prefer to survey all parents since PTA advocates for all children. Others prefer to only gather PTA member feedback. Still others use different color paper surveys for different groups: members, non-members, staff, students, etc.

**WSPTA Website Resources** ([www.wastatepta.org](http://www.wastatepta.org), click on Legislation page)

- *WSPTA Sample Survey (two formats: by issue and by category of issues)*

- *Summary of Proposed Issues (includes proposed long-term platform)*