

Position Paper

Board Members & Chairs



Region 2

The first time I became a PTA President, I wrote down every shred of information I learned in a spiral notebook I'd purchased just for this new assignment. I'd tucked inside it the printed pages of my Outlook calendar for August, September, and October, on which I carefully recorded important dates. Occasionally I'd sit down and re-read everything I'd written to make sure I knew what I was doing. Had I asked someone to get volunteers to stuff our fall packets? Was someone coordinating our Back-to-School day? Did we have volunteers for the Freshman Dance? There were so many things to do!

On top of all this, I knew I should sit down and read the State PTA By-Laws. I wasn't sure why, as the State couldn't possibly help me stuff those fall packets, but eventually I found time to make a cup of tea and sit in my messy living room to read the By-Laws. And I learned some very amazing things.

First, I learned that the elected officers really have no authority. At first I found this disappointing, but after thinking about it for a while I realized it was liberating. If someone called to demand that I take action or make a decision or "do something!" the correct response would be, "We can discuss that at our next meeting." I was actually relieved to learn I wouldn't have to go toe to toe with every upset or excited parent at our school.

Second, I learned that the elected officers have one important duty: to appoint the members of the Board of Directors and other Chairs. The word "appoint" really caught my eye. I'd have called what I and my fellow officers had been doing "begging," but if the State PTA wanted to call it "appointing," well, who was I to argue? But as that year went on I came to understand the importance of "appointing" Board Members and Chairs.

Let's talk about Board Members first. The Board of Directors includes the elected officers and several appointed leaders. Its exact makeup varies from unit to unit, but is always specified in the Standing Rules. There is no "correct" size for a Board of Directors, but ideally the number of appointed members will be larger than the number of elected officers. The appointed members often include Standing Chairs who serve all year long, such as the Newsletter Editor or Volunteer Coordinator; Chairs which have a counterpart at the Council and State level, such as Membership, Legislation and Reflections; and Chairs of your largest fundraisers and activities. Often units will have a "Board Member at Large" position so that people who are not serving in a particular position can be invited to serve on the Board.

The Board of Directors is the governing body of your PTA. Board Members should be willing and able to attend all Board Meetings, as their input and vote is vital to the successful day-to-day operation of the PTA. Ideally they will attend PTA training to gain a good understanding of their role as leaders in a non-profit, and to carry out their duties to the best of their abilities.

So do you want to appoint these people, or go begging? Yes, it's difficult to find people willing to take on these roles. But it's vital that they be chosen based on their experience, their good judgment, and their expertise.

The same is true of all other Chairs. Although they aren't involved in the day-to-day decision making of your PTSA, they are responsible for recruiting volunteers. This makes them the first line of contact many people have with the PTSA in your building. Who are the people who best represent your PTSA? It's important to choose carefully, because guess what? These are the people who get volunteers to stuff our fall packets, and coordinate Back-to-School day, and recruit volunteers for the Freshman Dance. You can't do it without them!