

Strikes, Protests, Work Stoppages and the PTA

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The Illinois PTA

www.illinoispta.org

2016

Strikes, Protests, Work Stoppages and the PTA

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Strikes, Protests, Work Stoppages and the PTA

Introduction

One of the most painful experiences a PTA and local school or school district can experience is a strike, protest, or work stoppage by any group. Everyone involved, from teaching staff to student, parent and community is affected. Emotions run high, many statements are made or positions taken that are later regretted, and there bonding of all parties after the protest takes time, patience and understanding.

In recent years there have continued to be some strikes or threats of strikes due to a multitude of factors. Lack of funding for raises, cuts in benefits to employees, rising costs of health care, and federal law such as ESSA, are some examples of the factors that are confronting schools throughout Illinois. The difficult financial conditions we have been facing are unlikely to improve without legislation to enhance revenues so the state increases its share of the cost of schooling.

This publication has been developed to give PTAs guidance in dealing with pending strikes, protests or work stoppages, suggestions for public positions and appropriate actions to be taken by a PTA during a strike. Sample letters for public distribution and activities to be sponsored by a PTA after a strike has been settled are also included.

The Illinois PTA is willing to help local PTA units and councils by sharing information and advice during a crisis such as a strike. Calls for assistance should be made to your district director or the state PTA office.

Strikes, Protests, Work Stoppages and the PTA

Positions

The following positions adopted by convention delegates are found in the front of the

[Illinois PTA Legislation Platform.](#)

Illinois PTA Statement of Position

Protests

We believe that verbal protests, petitions and peaceful assemblies not designed to interfere with the operation of public institutions are in the best tradition and may be used to call attention to inequities and injustices.

We further believe that adequate machinery must exist or be developed whereby student's teachers, administrators, parents, policy making boards, and other citizens may communicate freely so that constructive thinking of all parties may be expressed and considered.

Since nothing is more important than that the education of children and youth continue without interruption and without disruptive conflicts, we believe that no unauthorized individual or group has the right to cause the closing of schools or jeopardize the safety of the student, teachers or school property.

We believe that during work stoppage or strikes by educational personnel, the PTA should act as a source of information, maintain its position as advocates for children and urge educational personnel to return to their work assignments while continuing negotiations.

Continuing Positions

School Labor Issues

During any negotiation process we urge teachers to refrain from attempting to influence the thinking of students by discussing pending or resolved issues unless appropriate to the subject area being taught.

Illinois PTA Recommendations

The Illinois PTA recommends that all members of your PTA - especially the PTA officers and board members - school administration, teachers, all other school staff, bargaining agents, district superintendents, local school board members, and elected officials, are made aware of the official Illinois PTA positions given above. This can be accomplished through PTA newsletters, meetings with appropriate groups, letters to school boards, etc., and general media press releases or letters to the editor.

All members of the local PTA who may possibly be interviewed by the press should be very well versed in all appropriate PTA activities and the plans for your local PTA in case of a strike or work stoppage. *Only the president or persons authorized by your PTA should speak "officially" for your PTA.*

To be perfectly clear, based on our positions, particularly as stated above, that PTA should “maintain its position as advocates for children,” the PTA must remain neutral when the school board and union are in negotiations. Remember, eventually there will be a settlement, and then the PTA will be able to work with both the school board and the union, not having taken sides, and will be in a position to help bring the two sides back together to work to assure the best education for all children.

All members of the local PTA who may possibly be interviewed by the press should be very well versed in all appropriate PTA activities and the plans for your local PTA in case of a strike or work stoppage. Only the president or persons authorized by your PTA should speak "officially" for your PTA.

Activities for PTAs in Case of a Pending Strike

State statutes (Chapter 115, Educational Labor Relations 115ILCS 5/13) provide for collective bargaining, and a process that must be followed before teachers represented by an exclusive bargaining representative can strike. Groups such as PTAs and school boards all should know the process that provides for negotiations and public notice of intent to strike. This gives the local PTA or council time to plan for and implement appropriate activities. It is important that the local PTA or council call an organizational or special meeting (see your local unit or council bylaws), to properly plan for the release of any public statement(s) or sponsorship of PTA public meetings as suggested below.

PTA Sponsored Public Meeting(s)*

- Plan the meeting(s) well so that information on all aspects of the pending strike or a strike already in effect is given.
- Remember that this is to be a PTA meeting and not a public forum for any vested group. Provide for ample question and answer time and invite presenters who are well informed.
- The school board and the bargaining unit should be allowed equal time to present their positions.

- Provide the audience with copies of the Illinois PTA policies and positions regarding strikes and protests and what actions your PTA will be taking.
- Clearly establish during the meeting what actions the PTA will and will not be taking in case of a strike, i.e.
 - PTA does not staff classrooms in case of a strike.
 - PTA does not march in picket lines.
 - PTA does not serve refreshments to strikers or others involved in the strike.
 - PTA will continue to urge teachers to return to classrooms during negotiations.
 - PTA will not "take sides" during a strike.
 - PTA will not distribute literature from either side - but the PTA may present information on the positions of both "sides".
 - PTA will continue to work for adequate funding for schools and all other legislative positions supported by the Illinois PTA in our Legislative Platform.

** It is very possible that your PTA will sponsor a series of meetings. If this is the case, plan to have some of the meetings during the day and some in the evening, or even on a Saturday to accommodate working and single parents as well as teachers and members of the community.*

Students are often the most overlooked group in the school community and yet they are one group most directly affected by a strike as their education may be seriously interrupted.

- Parents should be encouraged to discuss the issues surrounding a pending strike with their student. Teachers are urged not to discuss a possible strike with their students because of their personal and union opinions.
- The PTA should ask that teachers prepare an outline of home study for students and make certain that all textbooks are taken home if and when necessary.
- Public libraries and community social service agencies should be contacted by the PTA so that plans can be made to accommodate students, who might otherwise not be supervised, have a place to study, or have access to resource materials and books. PTA members could act as volunteers at these locations to assist the staff and students.
- Information on childcare alternatives should be offered if they are available in the community.

Public Relations Before, During, and After a Strike

It is common practice for all parties in active negotiations - school boards and bargaining units alike - to invoke a policy of public silence. This is done to protect both sides from outside influences and public discussion of each item on the table that is disputed or being proposed. Therefore, it is often the PTA leadership that is free to speak as advocates for *children* that the media will contact for interviews.

It is essential that a specific person(s) in the local PTA or PTA Council be designated as a spokesman for the association. That person must be comfortable speaking with the press as well as knowledgeable about the issues, which brought about a strike action. Members of the media will be seeking 'media bytes' or quotes which may or may not reflect the actual position of the PTA. Reporters may try to provoke inflammatory statements which can be potentially harmful to the PTA. Extreme care should be taken when giving interviews, particularly taped ones for television, for they can be cut, spliced, etc., to reflect the views of the reporter/station rather than the views of the PTA.

PTA leaders may be asked by reporters to identify parents, teachers and students who they can interview. It is suggested that you either recommend knowledgeable PTA members and their families, or adopt a policy of making no referrals. Emotional reactions to a strike are what the press is seeking. Therefore, it is to the PTA's benefit to assure that persons to be interviewed understand the issues surrounding the strike and the process of collective bargaining. These persons should have a positive attitude while being realistic, speaking without taking sides and always speaking *for* children.

The reasons why PTA members do not staff classrooms during a strike, nor take positions favoring either side must be fully understood by the PTA spokesman. PTA positions such as class size, adequate pay for teachers, needed services and programs for students, the right of school boards to make decisions on behalf of the constituency which elected them, etc., should be stressed when opportunities present themselves. Many of these positions are to be found in the [Illinois PTA Legislation Platform](#).

Public relations efforts may also include: information letters or bulletins to your PTA members, press releases before, during and after a strike, or in response to specific issues raised during the strike, letters to the editors of your local newspapers (see sample letter in this publication), and of course the sponsorship of informational public meetings.

The PTA is many times placed in a spotlight position when a strike, protest or work stoppage occurs. It is critical that PTA leadership be prepared, informed, and resourceful when seeking assistance and guidance.

Tips for Presidents Contacted by the Media

- *Prepare a fact sheet with the PTA position to be kept by your phone or email access for a quick reference;*
- *If caught unprepared, do not attempt to speak "off the cuff" to the caller. State that this is not a convenient time to talk, ask when their deadline is and return the call once you have collected your thought; and*
- *Any personal opinion is an inappropriate subject for discussion by a PTA spokesperson.*

Informational Picketing

It is important when informational picketing is practiced by members of the bargaining unit, that the PTA leadership and members be prepared with the information referred to in this booklet, and that the public relations recommendations referred to on the prior page be used. Members of the press will probably be seeking PTA reactions to the informational picketing just as they would during an actual strike. It is crucial that consistency be the rule in all PTA interviews and public statements.

PTA Actions *After* a Strike, Protest or Work Stoppage

After a work stoppage the healing process must begin. Emotions may still be over-stimulated and students are many times caught between striking and non-striking employees, or decisions which have been made that directly affect their everyday school life. The PTA can take a pro-active position in the healing process by initiating a series of activities. Each planned activity must be in the "best interest of all students" while remembering that parents, employees and employers are all involved in restoring a positive school environment.

Suggested activities are:

- Hold a meeting with the school principal to seek his or her support for any plans you wish to make.
- Plan several activities such as a student recognition ceremony, or a community brunch which will bring all parties together for a positive experience.
- Place individual messages in each school employees' box expressing hope and offering PTA's cooperation for a productive school year.
- Publish a letter to all school staff and employees thanking them for their past support of the PTA and the programs you sponsor on behalf of all of the children. Ask for their continued support as everyone works together to assure a positive educational experience for all students.
- Utilize the opportunity to inform employees and employers of various appropriate PTA positions which you will continue to support such as adequate pay for teachers, smaller class size, etc. Many of these PTA positions may be specifically applicable to issues that were fundamental in the strike, protest, or work stoppage.

PTA should approach this work stoppage experience as both an opportunity and an obligation to improve the school while involving more parents, teachers and community members in positive planning for the future.

National PTA Position on Strikes and Work Stoppages

The National PTA has as statement on strikes and work stoppages which can be found on its website, [Positions Statement – Teacher Negotiations, Sanctions and Strikes.](#)

Illinois Legal Requirements Related to Strikes

In Illinois the statutes governing strikes in the field of education may be found in the [Illinois Compiled Statutes, Chapter 115, Educational Labor Relations](#).

For the section on strikes in *school districts other than Chapter 34 (Chicago)* refer to section 5/12

For the section on *Chapter 34 (Chicago)* refer to section 5/13

Definitions

Good Faith Bargaining – A legal requirement arising out of Section 8(d) of the National Labor Relations Act on both the Union and the Employer (where the Union is certified as the exclusive representative). Broadly defined as the duty of the parties to meet and negotiate at reasonable times and confer in good faith with respect to wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment, or the negotiation of an agreement or any question arising there under, and the execution of a written contract incorporating any agreement reached if requested by either party, but such obligation does not compel either party to agree to a proposal or require the making of a concession...

Impasse - A deadlock or stalemate in bargaining declared by one or both parties. Declaration of impasse usually precedes implementation of impasse resolution procedures or unilateral action by the employer.

Injunction – An order of a court or agency requiring a person to do or not do a certain act. Failure to abide by the terms of a court injunction may result in the court arresting and jailing the person for contempt of court.

Mediation – The attempt by an impartial third party, called a mediator, to bring the parties in a dispute together and assist them in reaching settlement. The mediator however, has no power to force or award a settlement but works instead to persuade the parties to reach agreement.

Sample Letter to the School Board and Teachers' Union

PTA local units and Councils usually have constant two-way communication with their teachers, school administration, and the school board. PTA Positions are shared freely via this process. However, if the need arises the following can be used as a guide to send a letter to both sides during negotiations.

Date

TO: _____, President,

_____ School District

_____ President, _____ Association

FROM: _____ PTA (Council or District PTA) President

The _____ PTA has carefully reviewed the bylaws and positions of PTA. _____ PTA will follow these guidelines. Accordingly, we shall remain neutral during negotiations. We recognize that at times negotiations can be very difficult and time consuming for the school district and the employee association.

To ensure compliance with the PTA policy of neutrality, PTA will not attend separate meetings with either school district or employee association representatives. It would be appropriate for PTA to invite the school district superintendent or representative and a representative of the district employee association to discuss negotiations at a PTA board association meeting, for sharing information, but both sides must be represented at that time each given equal time allotments. PTA will not distribute information provided by either side, but may choose to distribute information PTA has prepared. The

_____ PTA would like to continue its regularly scheduled meeting on the school or district sites, and its regular schedule of volunteer programs depending on availability of the buildings.

If you have any questions, I'd be happy to discuss our position of neutrality or any of the above-mentioned matters with you.

Sincerely,

PTA President (Council or District PTA)

Sample Letter to the Editor

Before you release a letter, either a version of the sample letter here, or your own letter, you may wish to seek the advice of your district director, the state PTA president or other appropriate state board member. The president of your PTA or Council should also include his/her telephone number or email address, or the contact information for the person chosen to be the PTA spokesperson in case the newspaper would like to have direct contact with that person.

The Position Statements from the Illinois and National PTAs, contained in this booklet, will give you guidance about PTA positions if you wish to develop a letter of your own.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

(Date)

Dear Editor:

The Illinois PTA recognizes the distress experienced by all parties involved in school strikes, protests or work stoppages. As a result, National and Illinois PTA Convention delegates, in the course of several years, have adopted position statements to guide our membership should these events occur. These statements and resolutions include the following:

1. The PTA does not take sides in a strike or on the issues being negotiated.
2. The PTA urges continuing negotiations while children are returned to school.
3. The PTA will act as a source of information for the general public, always remembering that the PTA is an advocate for ALL children.
4. The PTA being involved in the manning of classrooms with volunteers, unqualified or inappropriate teachers, is inconsistent with PTA efforts to obtain a qualified teacher in every classroom or maintain a neutral position in any strike or work stoppage.
5. In Illinois, we specifically recommend that during any negotiation process, teachers refrain from attempting to influence the thinking of students by discussing pending or unresolved issues unless appropriate to the subject area being taught. In addition, we encourage the full and continuous participation of teacher members in PTA activities.

Again, the PTA urges that the adults involved in all sides of this strike seek to solve their issues as rapidly as possible, since the disruption of the education of our children has a serious affect on their lives, and causes a loss of instruction time that cannot be recaptured.

Sincerely,

Name of President, Name of PTA
Address, Telephone number, Email address.

Resources and References

Illinois PTA
www.illinoispta.org

Illinois Education Labor Relations Board
(217) 782-9068
(312) -793-3170
www.illinois.gov/elrb

Illinois Association of School Boards
2921 Baker Dr., Springfield, IL 62703
(217) 528-9688
One Imperial Pl., 1 E 22nd St., Ste 20, Lombard, IL 60148
(630) 629-3776
www.iasb.com

Illinois Association of School Administrators
(217) 753-2213
www.iasaedu.org

Illinois Principals Association
2940 Baker Dr., Springfield, IL 62703
(217) 525-1383
www.ilprincipals.org

Illinois Education Association
100 East Edwards, Springfield, IL 62704
(217) 544-0706
800-252-8075
www.ieanea.org

Illinois Federation of Teachers
800-925-9242
www.ift-aft.org

Illinois State Board of Education
100 South First Street Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001
(217) 782-4321
100 W. Randolph, Ste 14-300, Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 814-2220
www.isbe.state.il.us