

PTO Today Magazine Submission Guidelines

Thank you for your interest in *PTO Today* magazine. *PTO Today* is an essential resource for leaders of parent groups (often called parent-teacher organizations) at the 80,000 elementary and middle schools across the United States. Articles focus on helping the volunteer leaders of these groups run their organizations more efficiently and support their schools more effectively.

The magazine is published six times a year, based on the school calendar; issues are dated January, March, April, August, September, and October.

Parent groups go by many different names, including PTA, PTO, and PTC. PTAs are those groups formally affiliated with the National PTA. All other parent groups, more than 75 percent of the total, are independent organizations and are often referred to collectively as PTOs.

We use “PTO” as a generic term—PTO Today writes about all parent groups, including PTAs. At the local level, all parent groups face similar challenges. For most of them, our magazine provides the only opportunity for volunteers to learn how similar groups (whether in the next town or across the country) run effective meetings and programs, solve problems, raise money, and otherwise enhance their children’s school experiences.

Our readers are the most active members of parent groups in K-8 schools. They are almost all women, and they are generally in their late 20s to mid-40s. Typically, they hold an office such as president, vice president, treasurer, or secretary. They chair one or more committees and are responsible for organizing specific events or programs. In most cases, they have little prior training or experience, yet a typical parent group raises tens of thousands of dollars each year for its school.

Editorial Approach

We run how-to pieces, profiles of programs and people, and articles by experts. The tone is informational and informal rather than newsy. We never talk down to readers, we use PTO-specific examples to express concepts, and we prefer writers who can use the language of parent groups. *(continues next page)*

We don't cover child-rearing issues, and we don't cover general education topics unless they have a very specific parent group angle. We focus exclusively on parent groups serving students in grades K-8; high school parent groups often take a form very different from that of elementary and middle school groups. Major topic areas we do cover include:

Parent involvement. The number one issue for most parent groups is how to get more of the parents at their school to participate. More volunteers mean better events and programs and less work for those who do participate. We have published articles about reaching out to parents who are new to the school, making sure volunteers have a positive experience and want to come back, and communicating effectively with parents who aren't members.

Leadership. These articles focus on soft skills such as settling conflicts and developing good communication skills, as well as hard skills such as running meetings efficiently and managing volunteers effectively.

Fundraising. Fundraising is a major activity for parent groups, especially in these times of shrinking school budgets. Parent groups pay for everything from teaching positions to music programs to ice cream socials.

Group management and organization. Many groups have little understanding of the legal, financial, and tax aspects of running what is essentially a small nonprofit business. Topics include tax issues, applying for 501(c)3 (charitable nonprofit) status under the federal tax code, bookkeeping basics, and legal requirements for keeping meeting minutes and other documents.

Working with school staff. Successful parent groups have a strong working relationship with the school principal, teachers, and staff. Past articles have discussed topics ranging from teacher appreciation to tactics for strengthening ties with the principal.

Playgrounds. The largest and most complex project many parent groups undertake is building a new playground. A playground project typically costs \$50,000 to \$100,000 or more. Parent groups raise the money. They also participate in the playground design and, often, the construction. Safety standards, community involvement, and large-project logistics are all topics that relate to parent group playground projects.

Education. Our coverage of education topics extends only to the role of the parent group; PTOs often run field trips, bring in arts and enrichment performers, and sponsor other programs that complement or enhance the curriculum.

(continues next page)

Queries

We recommend that you familiarize yourself with our previous content and our online community before submitting a query. Archived articles are sorted into topic areas on our website, which you can find listed at ptotoday.com/topics-a-z. Read the article “PTO vs. PTA: What’s the Difference?” for an overview of the differences between these two types of organizations, and look through our active message boards to get a sense of the issues that are important to parent groups.

Features run roughly 1,200 to 2,200 words, and the average assignment is 1,500 words. Department pieces run 600 to 1,200 words. Payment depends on the difficulty of the topic and the experience of the writer. We pay by the assignment, not by the word; our pay scale ranges from \$200 to \$700 for features and \$150 to \$400 for departments. We occasionally pay more for high-impact stories and highly experienced writers. We buy all rights, and we pay on acceptance (within 30 days of invoice).

We may ask writers to help us acquire appropriate art for articles, and we appreciate queries that offer art suggestions. We will review, but we do not encourage, unsolicited manuscripts.

Send queries to Editor, School Family Media/PTO Today, 100 Stonewall Blvd., Suite 3, Wrentham, MA 02093, or email us at queries@ptotoday.com. Indicate the subject of your proposed article, the angle you plan to use, whom you plan to interview (if applicable), and why you think the article is of interest to our readers. If you have been published before, please include several samples of your work with the query letter; if you have previous parent group leadership or volunteer experience, please let us know.