

PTO vs. PTA: Differences at a Glance

| | PTA | PTO |
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| DEFINITION | A local parent group formally affiliated with its state's PTA organization and the National PTA. | A local, independent parent group; in other words, any non-PTA group. (Many acronyms are used, such as HSA, PCC, PTO, and more; in this chart, we use "PTO" generically to mean any independent parent group.) |
| HOW MANY? | The National PTA reports close to 24,500 units. | Approximately 60,000 PTOs in the United States. (Our estimate takes the 89,500 K-8 schools in the country and subtracts the 24,500 K-8 PTA units along with an additional 5,000 for K-8 schools with no parent group.) |
| UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION/ PROFESSIONAL STAFF | The National PTA has more than 50 paid employees at its Alexandria, Va., headquarters or in Washington, D.C. Some state PTA offices have an additional paid staff member. Most national and state PTA revenues come from local unit dues. | There is no "national PTO" umbrella organization for independent parent groups. PTO Today is a media and services company with 30-plus employees that aims to serve both PTO and PTA local groups. The vast majority of PTO Today's income is from paid advertising. |
| DUES—REQUIRED? | Yes. | No. The decision to charge dues is up to the local group. |
| DUES—HOW MUCH? | Because state dues vary, this number is not exact. A conservative estimate is that the average local PTA unit sends nearly \$550 to its state PTA and to the National PTA in dues payments, based on an average of 156 members per local unit and average combined state plus national dues of \$3.50. Local groups with more members or in states with higher dues will send more. | It is up to your group; if you charge dues, the entire amount you collect stays at your school. Many PTOs choose to charge no dues as a way to foster parent involvement. |
| INSURANCE—REQUIRED? | Varies by state. Most often, yes. | No; it is up to your group. But we highly recommend that all groups get insurance. |
| INSURANCE—ACCESS | A local unit must be a member in good standing—with all member dues paid—to have access to insurance. | PTOs can purchase insurance through the optional PTO Today Plus program or obtain insurance on their own. Plus membership is \$199 annually and also brings additional benefits. |

PTO vs. PTA: Differences at a Glance (continued)

| | PTA | PTO |
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| INSURANCE—COST | Varies by state; most state PTAs have a negotiated rate with a preferred provider. Most local PTA units pay \$100 to \$300 annually for insurance coverage. | PTO Today Plus members have access to a negotiated rate with a preferred provider. PTO Today Plus Insurance rates range from \$285 to \$626 for different combinations of coverage, including officer liability, general liability, and property insurance. |
| TAX-EXEMPT STATUS | Required. Status is typically granted automatically as part of a parent group's affiliation with National PTA and payment of annual dues. | Not required, though recommended. If your group decides to become a federally recognized 501(c)(3) organization, it applies directly to the IRS and pays a one-time fee of \$275. Step-by-step instructions (successfully used by hundreds of independent parent groups) are available from PTO Today. |
| TOTAL COST FOR LOCAL GROUP | Average \$650 to \$850 annually, depending on the number of local members and the per-member state dues. You can get exact costs for your state from your state PTA organization. | \$0 (with no 501(c)(3) application and no insurance). \$275 one-time fee for 501(c)(3) application. \$484 to \$825 annually for Plus membership and insurance. |
| ADVOCACY | Required. The National PTA is openly an advocacy organization for a variety of policy initiatives. Local PTA units cannot advocate publicly against PTA-approved positions. | Not required. Groups may choose to play an advocacy role; however, many PTOs opt to remain strictly focused on parent involvement, school/teacher/student support, and community-building at the local school. |
| NATIONAL VOICE | Yes. Your group is part of state and national policy and advocacy efforts. Members may have an opportunity to take part in determining National PTA positions. | No. Most PTOs devote their energies to a single school or perhaps a single district or town. |

PTAs should review state-level bylaws for specific details.

Resources

Today, both PTOs and PTAs have access to more resources than ever before. The PTA offers several programs to local PTA units, including a well-received arts program and a good deal of assistance, resources, and insight.

PTO Today's resources are available to all parent groups, regardless of acronym, and most are free. Those resources include [School Family Night](#) planning kits, the [Back2School](#) program, [PTO Today Live Expos](#), the [File Exchange](#), and [hundreds of articles](#).

If you are discussing a choice between PTO and PTA, our best advice is to:

1. Determine your group's goals. (For example, is national political advocacy a priority?)
2. Determine which resources you'd take advantage of most and what your group is willing to pay for those.
3. Figure out which acronym is the best fit for your group based on the above preferences.
4. Make your choice, then get back to the more important work of building parent involvement.

Both PTOs and PTAs have done and will continue to do great work for children and schools. PTO Today looks forward to being of service no matter which option you choose.