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Dear Parents:

The following information 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 the event of a strike. 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 students, parents, and community—is affected. Emotions run high, many statements are made or positions taken that are later regretted, and the re-bonding of all parties after the protest takes time, patience, and understanding.

The Illinois PTA has many resources that can be shared with local PTA units and PTA councils during a crisis such as a strike. The following information has been taken from the *Illinois & National PTA Strikes, Protests, Work Stoppages, and the PTA* information packet which you will find in its entirety on the District's Web site and available for review in your school's office.

**National PTA Continuing Position on Teacher Union Negotiations:** During any negotiation process, PTA urges 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 (1973).

**Illinois PTA Statement of Position on Protests**

We believe that verbal protests, petitions, and peaceful assemblies not designed to interfere with the operation of public institutions are in the best traditions and may be used to call attention to inequities and injustices. We further believe that adequate machinery must exist or be developed whereby students, teachers, administrators, parents, policy-making boards, and other citizens may communicate freely so that the constructive thinking of all parties may be expressed and considered.

Since the most important thing is 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 students, teachers, or school property. We believe that during work stoppages or strikes by educational personnel, the PTA should act as a source of information, maintain its position of advocating for children, and urge educational personnel to return to their work assignments while continuing negotiations.

**Actions PTA will and will not be taking in the event of a strike:**

- PTA does not staff classrooms in the event 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 its legislative platform.

### **Illinois Statute 1713—Strikes**

Educational employees shall not engage in a strike except under the following conditions:

- they are represented by an exclusive bargaining representative;
- mediation has been used without success;
- at least 10 days have elapsed after a notice of intent to strike has been given by the exclusive bargaining representative to the educational employer, the regional superintendent, and the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board;
- the collective bargaining agreement between the educational employer and educational employees, if any, has expired; and
- the employer and the exclusive bargaining representative have not mutually submitted the unresolved issues to arbitration.

Teacher negotiations, sanctions, and strikes are very much a part of the reality of operating public schools. While there are great variations throughout the country in the intensity of teacher militancy, no school system can escape the necessity of responding to the growing voice in educational decision-making. Not only do school boards and school administrators have to reckon with teacher militancy, but PTA becomes involved. The PTA, because of its strategic position, has become involved in activities related to negotiations and may find itself on the horns of several dilemmas.

- If the PTA provides volunteers to man the classrooms during a work stoppage in the interest of protecting the immediate safety and welfare of children, it is branded as a strikebreaker.
- If the PTA does not take sides in issue being negotiated, it is accused of not being interested.
- If the PTA supports the position of the Board of Education, which is the representative of the public in negotiations, teacher members of the PTA may be prepared to withdraw membership and boycott local PTA activities.

As a result, PTA leadership in local units, councils, and states has expressed an urgent need for guidance in this difficult situation.

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

You can expect efforts from PTA to include: information letters or bulletins to your PTA members, which will probably have to be mailed; 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; public service announcements (PSAs) to be carried on local television stations; and the sponsorship of informational public meetings.

I will do whatever I can to inform the PTA community promptly and accurately regarding the current situation.

Yours in PTA,

***E lizabeth B ratkiv***

Northwest Suburban Council PTA President

