

# 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 the re-bonding of all parties after the protest takes time, patience and understanding.

In recent years, the number of strikes has continued to increase due to a multitude of factors. Lack of funding for raises, cuts in fringe benefits to employees, and rising costs of health care are some examples of the factors that are confronting schools throughout Illinois. The difficult financial conditions we have been facing are unlikely to improve.

According to statistics provided by the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board in late 1991, there have been 116 strikes since 1984 when Public Act 83-1014, House Bill 1530, the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act, was passed. In the seven years prior to 1984, there were a total of 196 strikes.

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 has many resources that can be shared with local PTA units and PTA councils during a crisis such as a strike. Calls for assistance should be made to your district director or the state PTA office.

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# Illinois PTA Positions and Policies related to strikes, protests and work stoppages.

*The following positions and policies are published annually in the Illinois PTA Yearbook.*

## CONTINUING POSITION

### Teacher Union Negotiations

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 (1973).

## ILLINOIS PTA STATEMENTS 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.

Note: See National PTA Position Statement in this publication - pages 9, 10, 11.

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### Illinois PTA Recommendation:

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.

## Activities for PTAs in case of a pending strike.

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Because state statues P.A. 85-1393, effective Sept 2, 1988, P.A. 86-412 as well as P.A. 1713 **Strikes**, provide for collective bargaining groups and school boards to have ample time for negotiations and public notice of intent to strike, the local PTA or council will have 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 in effect strike are 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 during the day and evening, or even on a Saturday to accommodate working and single parents as well as teachers and members of the community.**

### **Preparation for students:**

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 not encouraged to discuss a possible strike because of their personal and perhaps bias 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 child care 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 or station rather than the views of the PTA.

PTA leaders may be asked by reporters to identify parents, teachers and students whom they can interview. It is suggested that you either steer the reporters to 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 PTAs 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.

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 Yearbook. Others can be learned by contacting the Illinois PTA president or legislation chairman. The Illinois PTA public relations chairman is also available to give tips about how to conduct oneself during an interview.

Public relations efforts may also include: information letters or bulletins to your PTA members, which will probably have to be mailed to them; 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); Public Service Announcements (PSA's) to be carried on your local television stations - usually not longer than 30 to 60 seconds in length; 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.

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### **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 on page 3 - "Illinois PTA Positions and Policies related to strikes, protests and work stoppages", and that the public relations recommendations referred to on page 5 be adopted. 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 PTAs 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 which 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.

## Illinois Statute 1713 Strikes

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

- (a) they are represented by an exclusive bargaining representative;
- (b) mediation has been used without success;
- (c) 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.
- (c) the collective bargaining agreement between the educational employer and educational employees, if any, has expired; and
- (e) the employer and the exclusive bargaining representative have not mutually submitted the unresolved issues to arbitration.

If, however, in the opinion of an employer a strike is or has become a clear and present danger to the health or safety of the public, it may initiate in the circuit court of the county in which such danger exists an action for relief which may include, but is not limited to, injunction. The court may grant appropriate relief upon the finding that such clear and present danger exists. An unfair practice or other evidence of lack of clean hands by the educational employer is a defense to such action. Except as provided for in this subparagraph, the jurisdiction of the court under this Section is limited by "An Act relating to disputes concerning terms and conditions of employment:, approved June 19, 1925, as now or hereafter amended".

1 Chapter 48 2a.

### Definitions:\*

*Good Faith Bargaining* - Broadly defined as the duty of the parties to meet and negotiate at reasonable times with willingness to reach agreement on matters within the scope of representation; however, neither party is required to make a concession or agree to any proposal.

*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* - A court order which directs a person or organization either to take or to cease a particular action.

*Mediation* - Also called conciliation. Efforts of a neutral third party to help resolve a dispute (usually involving contract negotiations) between an employer and employee organization. The mediator normally has no power to impose a settlement.

*Sickout* - A job action involving a number of employees failing to report to work on the same day and claiming to be sick.

*Slowdown* - A job action involving employees working at less than normal efficiency, including "working to the rule."

\* Definitions courtesy of the California Congress of Parents, Teachers, and Students, Inc.

## **POSITION STATEMENT**

(REAFFIRMED 1987)

### **TEACHER NEGOTIATIONS, SANCTIONS, AND STRIKES (1968)**

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 demands of the organized teaching profession to have a greater 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.

1. 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 strike breaker.
2. If the PTA does not take sides in issues being negotiated, it is accused of not being interested.
3. If it supports the positions of the board of education, which is the representative of the public in negotiations, the teacher members of the PTA have threatened to withdraw membership and boycott the 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.

#### **Guides to State Congresses:**

The best efforts of state PTAs in regard to teacher negotiations, sanctions, and strikes start with alertness before a situation arises.

1. Study state laws regarding negotiations, sanctions, and strikes so as to act within the law, and so that counsel to local units will be consistent with the law.
2. Seek to bring together in conference meetings the state leadership of all groups concerned for the purpose of mutual understanding.
3. Encourage state legislation which will improve the procedures for negotiations and resolution of impasse.
4. Help local units understand particular state issues involved.
5. Urge school boards and teachers to establish frequent and regular lines of communication about educational concerns.

Guidelines for Councils and Local Units:

Because situations locally vary so widely, both across the country and even within states, guidelines cannot be highly specific. A great deal of discretion in action is left to the council and the local unit. These are suggested measures for action organized appropriately to three phases: the pre-strike period, during the strike, and after the strike. These guidelines, plus counsel from the state PTA and the basic good judgement of the people, should enable the council and the local PTAs to minimize the dilemmas and to contribute constructively to community understanding, teacher satisfactions, renewal of cordial parent-teacher dialogue, and improved educational climate for children.

Pre-strike Period:

1. Continue to work for quality education. Efforts in this regard reassure teachers that parents are helping to achieve their goals of greater job satisfactions and improvement of substandard salaries.
2. Be alert to early symptoms of teacher dissatisfaction:
  - a. Abnormal turnover in teaching staff and administrators.
  - b. Teacher-supported legislation defeated by state legislature.
  - c. Growing dissatisfaction of teachers as evidenced by complaints.
3. Seek action that corrects the basic causes of dissatisfaction -- salaries, student conduct, teaching conditions, lack of participation in decision-making.
4. Inform the officers of teachers' organizations, the school boards, and administrators of the appropriate role PTA might play in the event of a work stoppage, and be advised as to provisions for the welfare and safety of children during work stoppage.
5. Urge school boards and local teachers' organizations to consider the advisability of developing written agreements on negotiation procedures, including grievance procedures. Because work stoppages and negotiations are oftentimes conducted in a way that tends to create dissension and low morale that are harmful to children, the PTA should do all it can to prevent such situations from developing. The advance planning and the orderly procedures embodied in written agreements may avert strikes.
6. Learn from the school board and the teachers' organizations what issues are being negotiated.
7. Provide full public airing of the issues. The purpose of these discussions is to dispel confusion and develop intelligent, informed public opinion. If a strong majority opinion develops regarding an issue that affects children, the PTA has a responsibility to bring this to the attention of the negotiating parties. PTAs should be keenly aware that the decisions made in negotiations oftentimes have much more of an impact upon the welfare of children than to temporary closing of the school and other disruptive action.
8. Reexamine the role of teacher members in the local unit. Teachers as well as parents should join and participate by individual choice. Their motivation to participate should spring from a professional awareness of the unique contributions which they may render, and the value of teacher rapport with parents and the community. The teacher continues as a willing partner in the PTA when participation is free of unwarranted expectations.

During the Strike:

1. Urge immediate and continuous negotiations and if necessary mediation to get schools open as soon as possible. If negotiation is delayed, the PTA should seek to bring the school board representatives and teachers' organization representatives together.
2. Serve as an open forum to inform the public on the points of disagreements and the progress of negotiations.
3. PTA should not man the classrooms, except possibly for a day in the absence of advance notice of a strike. Not only is manning of classrooms inconsistent with PTA efforts to obtain a qualified teacher in every classroom, but personal liability may be incurred. If the school administration intends to keep schools open during a teacher walkout, it should develop a corps of volunteers outside the PTA structure.
4. Suggest and urge appropriate action by parents, community agencies, and volunteer groups that will protect children during the period the school is closed.
5. Encourage the full and continuous participation of teacher members in PTA activities.

After the Strike:

1. Plan activities that will restore harmony, promote teacher morale, and renew parent-teacher dialogue.
2. Through informed public opinion see that the negotiated agreements which settled the strike are faithfully implemented.
3. Work for community understanding and support of school needs.

## Resources and References

Illinois PTA  
901 South Spring Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62704  
(217) 528-9617

Illinois Education Labor Relations Board  
320 West Washington, 2nd Floor  
Springfield, Illinois 62701  
(217) 782-9068  
Civic Opera Building, 20 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1000  
Chicago, Illinois 60606  
(312) 793-3170

Illinois Association of School Boards  
1209 South 5th Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62703  
(217) 528-9688

Illinois Association of School Administrators  
230 Broadway, Suite 200  
Springfield, Illinois 62701  
(217) 522-4479

Illinois Principals Association  
430 East Vine Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62703  
(217) 525-1383

Illinois Education Association  
100 East Edwards  
Springfield, Illinois 62704  
(217) 544-0706

Illinois Federation of Teachers  
700 South College  
Springfield, Illinois 62704  
(217) 544-8562

Illinois State Board of Education  
100 South First Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001  
(217) 782-4321

Illinois Association of Education Office Personnel  
Address changes with each new administration.  
Contact the State Board of Education Office for  
Name, Address, Telephone of President.