



Starting a PTO, PTA, or Booster Club in North Carolina: A Guide for Parents

Why Parent Groups Matter

Public schools do incredible work, but they cannot always meet every student's need on their own. Parent-led organizations such as Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs), Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), and Booster Clubs help schools provide additional opportunities, resources, and support for students.

These groups strengthen the connection between families and schools, helping create a more engaged school community. They often fund classroom supplies, teacher appreciation activities, field trips, extracurricular programs, and student enrichment opportunities that might not otherwise be possible.

Just as importantly, parent organizations help increase a school's capacity. By organizing volunteers, raising funds, and building partnerships, they allow educators to focus more of their time and energy on teaching and supporting students.

Understanding the Difference: PTO vs. PTA vs. Booster Club

Before getting started, it's important to understand the differences between these three types of organizations.

PTO (Parent Teacher Organization)

A PTO is an independent parent-led organization that supports a school community.

Unlike a PTA, a PTO does not belong to a state or national organization. This means the group has flexibility to create its own structure, write its own bylaws, and determine its own priorities.

Advantages of a PTO

- Greater local autonomy
- Ability to create customized bylaws
- Local control over decisions and programming
- Dues and fundraising dollars remain with the local organization

Things to Consider

- The group must create its own governing documents
- The organization is responsible for obtaining its own tax-exempt status
- Training and resources must be found independently

PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

A PTA is affiliated with state and national PTA organizations.

Local PTAs operate under the guidance of their state PTA and the National PTA. In return for paying membership dues and following organizational rules, PTAs gain access to training resources, leadership development, insurance options, and support.

PTA organizations oftentimes also advocate for public education at the local, state, and national levels.

Advantages of a PTA

- Established organizational structure
- Training and leadership support
- Access to resources and best practices
- Nonprofit status generally covered through PTA affiliation
- Opportunities to participate in statewide and national advocacy efforts

Things to Consider

- Must follow PTA rules and bylaws
- Membership dues are shared with state and national organizations
- Less flexibility in organizational structure

North Carolina PTA: <https://www.ncpta.org>

Booster Club

A Booster Club is usually formed to support a specific school activity, team, or program.

Unlike a PTO or PTA, Booster Clubs generally focus their fundraising and volunteer efforts on one particular area, such as:

- Athletics
- Band

- Chorus
- Theater
- Robotics
- Academic teams
- Arts programs

A single school may have several Booster Clubs operating at the same time.

Advantages of a Booster Club

- Focus on a specific student program
- Clear fundraising goals
- Easier to engage supporters with a common interest

Things to Consider

- Benefits are usually limited to a particular program
- The organization must generally establish its own nonprofit and financial structure

Getting Started

Step 1: Talk with Like-Minded Parents and Supporters

Every successful parent organization begins with a small group of people who care about the same issues.

Start by talking with parents, guardians, teachers, and community members who are interested in supporting the school.

Use these conversations to:

- Build an initial planning team
- Discuss school needs and opportunities
- Identify shared goals
- Decide whether a PTO, PTA, or Booster Club is the best fit
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As your group begins planning, consider inviting a parent or supporter with experience in areas like accounting, finance, law, or nonprofit operations to join the conversation. Their perspective can be helpful as you think through organizational structure, finances, and administrative requirements.

You don't need a large group to begin. A handful of committed volunteers is often enough to get started.

Step 2: Create a Mission Statement

Your mission statement explains why your organization exists.

A strong mission statement helps guide decisions and keeps everyone focused on the group's purpose.

Questions to consider include:

- What challenges are you hoping to address?
- What opportunities do you want to create for students?
- How will families benefit?
- How will teachers benefit?
- How will the school benefit?

Example Mission Statement

"The mission of the ABC Elementary PTO is to strengthen partnerships among families, teachers, and school staff while supporting programs and opportunities that help all students succeed."

Step 3: Brainstorm Activities and Goals

Before formally organizing, start listing ideas for how your group might support the school.

Possible activities include:

- Family engagement nights
- Teacher appreciation events
- School beautification projects
- Classroom grants
- Field trip support
- Fundraisers
- Student enrichment programs
- Volunteer coordination

This is also a good time to talk with teachers and staff to better understand the school's needs.

Sometimes the school's greatest needs are not immediately obvious to parents.

Step 4: Meet with the Principal

A strong partnership with school leadership is critical.

Schedule a meeting with the principal to share:

- Your mission statement
- Initial goals
- Planned activities
- Your desire to support the school

The principal can provide valuable guidance and may help identify areas where volunteers and fundraising efforts can have the greatest impact.

Successful parent organizations work alongside school leadership rather than independently from it.

Step 5: Draft Basic Bylaws

Bylaws are rules that govern how your organization operates.

They establish your group's structure, decision-making processes, and financial oversight. Whether you're starting a PTO, PTA, or Booster Club, having clear bylaws helps create transparency, consistency, and accountability.

You do not need to start from scratch. Many organizations make sample bylaws available online, and reviewing examples can help your group understand what topics should be addressed.

PTA-Specific Guidance

If you're forming a PTA, contact the [North Carolina PTA](#) for guidance. Because local PTAs operate under state and national PTA organizations, certain requirements and provisions may already need to be included in your local bylaws.

PTO and Booster Club Guidance

PTOs and Booster Clubs generally create their own bylaws. Consider reviewing examples from established organizations and speaking with leaders from existing parent groups in your district.

Helpful resources:

- [PTO Today: Sample Bylaws](#)
- [PTO Today: How to Write](#)

Consider reaching out to established PTOs and Booster Clubs in nearby schools to learn from their experiences.

Important Note

Avoid formally adopting bylaws until you've:

1. Announced the organization to your school community, and
2. Held your first official meeting

A common practice is to adopt bylaws with a two-thirds majority vote of those present.

Step 6: Establish Financial Controls

Strong financial practices protect both the organization and its volunteers.

Even small organizations should have clear financial safeguards from the beginning.

Consider implementing:

- Two signatures on checks
- Monthly financial reports
- Annual financial reviews
- Budget approval by members
- Separation of duties when handling money
- Proper documentation of expenses

Good financial controls build trust with parents, donors, and school administrators.

Helpful resources:

- [PTO Today: 5 Smart Financial Controls](#)
- [PTO Today: Financial Best Practices](#)
- [PTO Today: Treasurer Annual Checklist](#)

Step 7: Obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN)

An Employer Identification Number (EIN) is issued by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Think of it as a Social Security number for your organization.

An EIN is necessary for:

- Opening a bank account
- Filing tax forms
- Applying for nonprofit status

Organizations can obtain an EIN by submitting [IRS Form SS-4](#) or applying through the IRS website.

Step 8: Apply for Tax-Exempt Status

Organizations that raise and spend money should carefully consider their nonprofit status.

PTA-Specific Guidance

In North Carolina, local PTAs are chartered by the [North Carolina PTA](#) and generally operate under the organization's existing 501(c)(3) nonprofit structure.

Work directly with the North Carolina PTA to ensure all requirements are met.

PTO and Booster Club Guidance

Independent organizations generally must obtain their own nonprofit tax-exempt status.

After obtaining an EIN, groups can apply for recognition as 501(c)(3) charitable organizations through the IRS.

Nonprofit status may provide important benefits, including:

- Eligibility for charitable donations
- Eligibility for many grants
- Certain tax advantages
- Increased credibility with donors

Helpful resource:

- [PTO Today: Tax Exemption and Nonprofit Status](#)

Because tax and legal requirements can change, groups should consult [current IRS guidance](#) or a qualified professional when pursuing nonprofit status.

Step 9: Open a Bank Account

Once you have an EIN, open a bank account in the organization's name.

Keeping organization funds separate from personal accounts is essential.

When selecting a financial institution, consider:

- Monthly fees
- Online banking options
- Multiple account signers
- Local branch access
- Nonprofit-friendly services

Helpful resource:

- [PTO Today: Tips for Choosing a Bank Account](#)

Step 10: Announce Your Organization and Hold Your First Meeting

Once the foundation is in place, it's time to introduce your organization to the school community.

Consider:

- Sending a welcome letter to families
- Sharing information through school communications
- Creating social media accounts
- Inviting teachers and staff to participate

For your first meeting:

- Prepare and distribute an agenda
- Explain the organization's mission
- Share goals and planned activities
- Answer questions
- Encourage volunteer involvement

Try to keep the meeting to one hour or less

If a discussion becomes lengthy or controversial, consider assigning a committee to research the issues and report back later.

The primary goal of the first meeting is to build excitement, establish momentum, and encourage participation.

If your group is ready, you may:

- Adopt bylaws
- Elect officers
- Approve initial priorities

If more discussion is needed, those actions can wait until a future meeting.

Final Thoughts

Starting a PTO, PTA, or Booster Club may seem intimidating at first, but most successful organizations begin with a small group of people who simply want to help their school community.

By building relationships, establishing clear expectations, and maintaining good financial and organizational practices, your group can create lasting benefits for students, teachers, and families for years to come.