

# RUNNING YOUR PTA WHEN SCHOOL IS CLOSED

## PART 1: MEETINGS AND ELECTIONS

### LEADERSHIP RESOURCES



The COVID-19 pandemic has closed schools across Illinois, and as of this writing, it appears that schools may be closed for the remainder of the school year. That has left many PTAs and PTA Councils wondering how they can handle their business when school is closed and in-person meetings are not permitted or advisable. Like you, Illinois PTA is having to address these issues as well, and we will continue to provide our PTAs with advice and guidance on how to proceed in this unprecedented situation.

We have compiled a list of questions you may need answered on how your PTA or Council can continue to operate. As always, the key to running your PTA is in your bylaws, so be sure to have them at hand when discussing how your PTA or Council will be moving forward with your board. If you have questions not addressed here, please contact your Region or District Director.

#### **What PTA business must be done by the general membership?**

The list of items that your PTA bylaws require your PTA's membership to vote on is fairly short:

- Accepting the audit report (at the first membership meeting of the fiscal year)
- Adopting or amending the budget
- Adopting or amending the bylaws (note: requires a two-thirds majority)
- Election of the nominating committee
- Election of officers

Keep in mind that your bylaws may be slightly different than the standard Illinois PTA Bylaws for Local Units (or for PTA Councils), so be sure to double-check your actual bylaws to ensure there are no other items that the general membership must vote on. Items to check include how both committee chairs and the audit committee are put in place.

Also note that all bylaws references here refer to the articles and sections in the standard Illinois PTA Bylaws for Local Units. Your actual PTA bylaws may have the relevant section slightly off from these references if your PTA has added sections in certain spots.

#### **What PTA business can the Executive Board handle?**

Beyond the basic items listed in the question above, the Executive Board (your officers and committee chairs) can handle essentially all the remaining business your PTA needs to conduct. The most crucial item for most PTAs at this time of the year is electing the audit committee. Procedures for doing so should be in Article XI – Standing and Special Committees, Section 5 of your PTA bylaws.

Again, your local bylaws may have added items that the general membership must vote on to the list above.

#### **Can our PTA or board meet virtually?**

Yes. All attendees need to be able to hear and follow the business being discussed. You will need a platform that can handle the size of your meeting. Keep in mind that a virtual general membership meeting may have many more participants than a regular in-person meeting, so plan accordingly.

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Illinois PTA does not endorse any specific virtual meeting platform, but an internet search provides this incomplete list of companies offering virtual meeting services:

- ezTalks Cloud Meeting
- Zoho Meeting
- join.me
- Zoom
- GoToMeeting
- ClickMeeting
- Skype
- WatchItToo
- Infinite

Illinois PTA encourages PTAs and Councils to research what platform would work best for their situation. Note that some platforms may have special non-profit rates that are not listed on their site or may be giving discounted rates to non-profits or education-related organizations during the current situation, so be sure to contact them directly regarding pricing.

It may also be possible that one of your members works for a business that might be willing to donate the use of their virtual meeting platform after business hours for a PTA meeting.

### **Help! I've never run a virtual meeting before. What do I need to do?**

Most virtual meeting platforms are fairly easy to use, so you probably won't have too much trouble. Consider running a quick practice meeting with a couple of your PTA board members or even your kids to ensure that you know how to start the meeting, that you know how to show documents on your screen, that people can hear you talk, and that you know how to use the platform.

Other things to consider before your meeting:

- Set the ground rules in advance.
- Remind everyone to mute themselves if they are not speaking. (Note: Most platforms give the meeting facilitator the ability to mute all participants at once, so be sure you know how to do that should some unfortunate background noises happen during your meeting.)
- Set a strict starting time that is convenient for all participants. Encourage people to plan on joining the meeting a few minutes before the starting time so they can work out any technical issues they might encounter before the start of the meeting.
- Make sure everyone has the meeting agenda and all information prior to the start of the meeting.
- Ask participants to call from a quiet location to minimize background noise, keeping in mind that this might not be possible for all with everyone indoors in the current situation and kids possibly searching out mom or dad during the call.
- Consider having all the documents you intend to show on your screen in a specific folder with numbered file names in the order you will need them. This will cut down on the time it takes you to find the next document you need (even if you have them all open and accessible in your taskbar).

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When conducting the meeting:

- Conduct a roll call at the beginning of the meeting to ensure you have a quorum. If you do this by having people announce themselves on the call, consider going through the alphabet by first or last name so everyone doesn't try to announce themselves at the same time (i.e., "Everyone who's last name starts with A please announce yourself.").
- Ask speakers to identify themselves before speaking every time. This also helps your secretary keep the minutes.
- You may need to remind people occasionally to unmute themselves to speak.
- Just like in a regular in-person meeting, allow only one person to speak at a time.
- Votes on action items may be done by voice vote, but if you are unsure of the result from a voice vote, conduct a roll call vote by the secretary using the roll from the start of the meeting (and adding anyone who has joined the meeting since then). The secretary can give the results of the vote, but the president (or person presiding) must announce the results themselves and declare whether the motion has passed or failed.

Other tips on running a virtual meeting:

- [Three Tips for Facilitating Virtual Meetings](#)
- [Running Effective Virtual #Nonprofit Meetings: 9 Best Practices for Facilitating Engagement](#)
- [12 Handy Tips for Running Better Remote Meetings](#)

### What if we can't hold a virtual meeting?

If for any reason your PTA cannot hold a virtual meeting, your bylaws do allow your Executive Committee (i.e., your officers) to conduct business vital to the operation of your PTA in an emergency; however, no action can conflict with that taken by the general membership or Executive board. This should be in Article X – Executive Committee, Section 4 of your PTA's bylaws. **Note that this does not mean your Executive Committee can elect your nominating committee or officers for next year.**

### How do we conduct the election of officers online?

If your PTA elects its officers in the spring, your PTA should already have a nominating committee elected and putting together a slate of candidates. Once the nominating committee has its slate, you can announce the candidates electronically as well as the date at least 30 days after the announcement of the slate for the election meeting.

In conducting the election meeting online, you will need to:

- Verify that you have a quorum present.
- Allow nominations from the floor for each position.
- For uncontested positions, you can conduct a voice vote.
- For contested positions, you need to conduct a ballot vote in some manner (more below).

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### **What if we hadn't elected a nominating committee yet?**

You can still hold an election meeting, but all candidates will need to be nominated from the floor. Be sure to announce your election meeting stating that at least 30 days in advance to allow people time to consider running from the floor.

### **If our nominating committee has already announced the slate, do we still need an election meeting?**

Yes. Members must be given the opportunity to nominate from the floor (see Article VI – Officers and Their Election, Section 4c of your PTA bylaws).

### **Can we vote electronically?**

Yes; however, the manner of voting needs to be anonymous. Your virtual meeting platform may provide a way to do this (it may be described as a “poll”). You may need to find an online voting platform to do this.

### **Can we vote by mail?**

Yes; however, you still need the online election meeting to allow for nominations from the floor. Once nominations are complete, you can mail out a ballot for contested elections.

To vote by mail, you will need to ensure that ballots are sent to every member, that there is no easy way to duplicate ballots (e.g., by scanning a blank ballot and printing more out), that there is a reasonable deadline for returning ballots, and that a quorum of votes are returned.

### **What if we can't hold an election meeting physically or virtually?**

If an election meeting is not possible, the current officers continue to serve in their positions until their successors are elected and assume their duties (see Article VI – Officers and Their Election, Section 2c of your PTA bylaws). As soon as a physical meeting is possible, the Executive Board should call for a special general membership meeting to elect new officers (see Article VIII – General Membership Meetings, Section 3 of your PTA bylaws for timing between the call and meeting).

### **How do we change our signatories on our bank account?**

Under normal circumstances, this is easily done after the election of new officers with a quick visit to your bank. Contact your bank about how they are handling such actions and what documentation they will need from outgoing and incoming officers to make the change. Your current and new officers may need to plan a time when they can line up in their cars in a drive-through lane or need to be allowed into the bank lobby one at a time to maintain physical distancing.