

**Montgomery County Council
of
Parent Teacher Associations**

**LISTSERVS
GUIDE
2009-2010**

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www.mccpta.net

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Please note: This Guidebook is available on the MCCPTA website at:

http://www.mccpta.net/ptaofficers_handbook.html

Help is always available from the Listservs Moderator:

Listservsmod@mccpta.com

Section I - A Beginners Guide to the MCCPTA Listservs

May 24, 2006

Last updated March 11, 2009

MCCPTA Listservs

- MCCPTA maintains five listservs. Two of them are currently open to all who wish to subscribe. These two lists are called MCCPTA_Bulletin and MCCPTA_Delegates. It is important to note that as decided at the Feb. 27, 2007 Delegates Assembly, only people with voting privileges at a DA will be able to post messages to MCCPTA_Delegates. A detailed description of these two lists can be found in documents on the MCCPTA website. You must make a request to be added to either or both of these lists. Addition is not automatic!
- The other three lists are MCCPTA_Board, which is for MCCPTA Board of Directors members only plus the Listservs Subcommittee and Website Subcommittee Chairs and the MCCPTA Office Manager; MCCPTA_Treasurers, which is for Treasurers of locals only, plus the MCCPTA President and Treasurer, Listservs Subcommittee and Website Subcommittee Chairs and the MCCPTA Office Manager; and MCCPTA_Presidents, which is for Presidents of locals only, plus the MCCPTA President and Vice-Presidents, Listservs Subcommittee and Website Subcommittee Chairs and the MCCPTA Office Manager. Other MCCPTA Officers, Area Vice Presidents and Cluster Coordinators may also request to be added to the MCCPTA_Treasurers and MCCPTA_Presidents listservs. Local Presidents may request to be added to the MCCPTA_Treasurers listserv, but will only be added if the local Treasurer is also on the listserv since the point of the listserv is to reach local Treasurers directly. Local Presidents may also request that their President Elect or Executive Vice President be added to the MCCPTA_Presidents listserv, as long as the President is already on the listserv.
- MCCPTA_Board is the only list that allows attachments. Any materials posted to the other four lists must be included in the text of the message.

Listservs Moderators

- There is one primary moderator, also called the Listservs Subcommittee Chair, for all five listservs who handles all administrative tasks such as adding new subscribers, changing email addresses, changing delivery options, etc.
- For the lists that are ‘moderator post only,’ in addition to the primary moderator, there are other people designated as moderators who have the ability to post messages. These people are: for MCCPTA_Bulletin – the MCCPTA President; for MCCPTA_Presidents – the MCCPTA President; for MCCPTA_Treasurers – the MCCPTA President and MCCPTA Treasurer.

- In addition, for all five listservs, the MCCPTA President may appoint other moderators as needed from among the MCCPTA Officers. Finally, since it is recommended that all listservs have multiple owners, the President reserves the right to appoint for all listservs an additional owner or owners from the MCCPTA Officers or the Listservs Subcommittee who has knowledge and expertise with Yahoo Groups.

Membership Basics

- Instructions for joining MCCPTA_Bulletin and MCCPTA_Delegates can be found in the subscription information document and on the MCCPTA website.
- As long as they have provided the requested contact information, including an email address (Blue Book information for local's presidents and treasurers), new Board members are added automatically to the MCCPTA_Board and MCCPTA_Bulletin listservs as soon as they assume office, Presidents of locals are added automatically to the MCCPTA_Presidents listserv upon assuming office, and Treasurers of locals are added automatically to the MCCPTA_Treasurers listserv upon assuming office.
- Other MCCPTA Officers, Area Vice Presidents and Cluster Coordinators need to contact the moderator to request to be added to MCCPTA_Presidents and/or MCCPTA_Treasurers – they are not added automatically. The same is true for local Presidents that wish to be put on the MCCPTA_Treasurers listserv, and that wish to have their President Elect or Executive Vice President added to the MCCPTA_Presidents listserv.
- If you have assumed office and find there is a delay in your being added to a listserv, please feel free to contact the moderator directly.

Message Overlap

- It is important to note that there is minimal message overlap between MCCPTA_Delegates and MCCPTA_Bulletin, but the MCCPTA_Presidents listserv, MCCPTA_Treasurers listserv and MCCPTA_Board listserv will have some overlap with the other listservs.

Section II - MCCPTA General Membership Listservs General Information

June 5, 2005

Last modified March 11, 2009

MCCPTA has two general membership listservs.

- The purpose of this document is to help familiarize everyone with the two general membership MCCPTA listservs provided for our members, and to remind everyone of some important information.
- The purpose of these listservs is to facilitate communication between PTA/PTSA's of public schools in our county, by sending information relevant to education in Montgomery County. No messages that are in conflict with the Mission or Objects of the PTA will be allowed.
- The two general membership listservs are called MCCPTA_Bulletin and MCCPTA_Delegates. Each list is unique in the type of messages that it contains. The differences between the two lists are detailed below.

Bulletin is a moderator post only list, whereas Delegates is a discussion list.

- Both lists can be pretty high traffic. There will be minimal cross posting of messages between the two lists, although occasionally something gets sent accidentally to the wrong list and must be reposted to the correct list. Certain administrative or high importance messages need to be sent to both lists to maximize distribution. Every effort is made to minimize overlap. Thus, in order to receive ALL the news, you should subscribe to both!
- While both lists currently have open membership, effective Feb. 27, 2007, only people that have voting privileges at a Delegates Assembly may post to MCCPTA_Delegates. All others will be set to "readonly."

The types of messages sent to each list are broken down thusly:

- Bulletin: Official MCCPTA documents including but not limited to agendas, press releases, draft & approved meeting minutes, summaries of committee meetings, committee reports; announcements of MCCPTA & other meetings, forums, workshops; new or existing resolutions to be introduced or voted on at a DA if online discussion is not desired; requests for feedback that go directly to a central collection point & don't need discussion; official MCPS, MSDE, Maryland or National PTA documents and announcements.

- Delegates: New resolutions that will be introduced or voted on at a DA if online discussion is desired; questions from members of the list; questions from locals; feedback requests that need discussion; discussion of school or education issues of interest to list members; news articles of interest; non-MCCPTA press releases.
- If you are uncertain where a message should be posted, please contact the Listservs Subcommittee Chair who will be happy to help determine the proper list. Keep in mind that MCCPTA_Bulletin reaches a larger audience. Most people that prefer to be on just one list choose MCCPTA_Bulletin.

Replying to messages.

- Replies on the MCCPTA_Bulletin listserv go to the person who sent the original message. When replying to a message, it is important for you to identify yourself, so that the recipient knows with whom they are corresponding.
- Replies on the MCCPTA_Delegates listserv go to the entire list unless you change the recipient email address. If your reply is not relevant to the entire list, then please change the recipient address and send your reply just to the person that posted. Exactly how to do this varies depending on which mail utility you are using. If you have problems, or are unsure how to do this, the moderator may be able to help. Please read the etiquette guidelines before you post a message or reply to a message. It is helpful to those reading the list in digest format and online if you put your email address below your name at the end of the message.

Please pay special attention to messages with “ADMIN” in their subject.

- These messages will contain important information that may affect your membership, group settings, or other matters of great importance.

If for some reason you stop getting email, it may be because your email address is bouncing your messages.

- The moderator cannot reactivate a bouncing account, only send reactivation requests. Then to reactivate your account, you must respond to the reactivation request. Sometimes reactivation requests get caught up in spam filters. If you realize that you are not getting any messages, you might want to contact the moderator or a friend that you know is also on the listserv.

Neither MCCPTA_Delegates nor MCCPTA_Bulletin accepts attachments.

- All text must be pasted into the body of the message.

Where to get help with listserv issues.

- Questions or issues for the moderator, such as changing your delivery options or leaving the list, should be sent directly to the moderator, not to the entire list. The moderator's email address is found at the bottom of every message you receive. It is critical when contacting the moderator that you identify yourself, and the specific listserv you are writing about, since the moderator is responsible for multiple listservs.
- Finally, the moderator is here to help you with any problems you may have. Please do not hesitate to ask for assistance!
- **Listservs Moderator - listservsmod@mccpta.com**

Section III - Listserv Guidelines and Etiquette for MCCPTA Delegates

July 12, 2005
Last modified March 11, 2009

In order to facilitate communication on the MCCPTA_Delegates listserv, we are asking all members of our listserv to please be aware of and abide by a few basic rules of internet etiquette and specifically our listserv's guidelines.

Please be sure to sign your message with the same information we ask of people that speak at Delegates Assemblies:

1. your name - so we can get to know each other between Delegates Assemblies.
 2. your school name - please don't abbreviate the school name, since there are almost 200 schools in the county and new members may not know what your school abbreviation means! You can use ES for elementary school, MS for middle school and HS for high school, though.
 3. your PTA/PTSA position.
- If you are forwarding a newspaper article link, please identify yourself in the space provided by the newspaper website for comments.

Be respectful and courteous.

- Please refrain from any personal and direct retorts on individual PTA members or elected officials by name. Please disagree in a friendly and respectful manner. We all have very strong opinions, but we can disagree in a respectful manner without getting personal. Discussion of ideas is one of the best ways to learn. Discussion of people is counter-productive and to be avoided. All members of this list are equally important, and their opinions and ideas are equally valuable. E-mail feels like a private discussion, but it is not. A good rule of thumb is, “Never post anything you wouldn’t want to read on the front page of the Washington Post.”

Make sure the subject is descriptive.

- Please be sure to put a descriptive subject in your message. This helps people who are scanning their email for subjects of interest to them. If you are reading the list in digest and have not upgraded your message format to “fully featured,” when you reply to a message, be sure to change the subject or it will just say “re: digest (number).”

To originate a message to the group, just email it to:

MCCPTA_Delegates@yahoogroups.com

Please trim your replies.

- It is helpful if you can remove all but the pertinent thoughts you are responding to when you reply. For instance, if the message you are replying to contains three paragraphs of ideas, and you are only commenting on what is said in the first paragraph, delete the second two paragraphs before adding your own thoughts. Even if the entire message is relevant to your response, please delete the footer information, since Yahoo groups add the footer automatically to all messages it sends. If you leave the original message you are replying to intact, and then add your comments, the footer of the message appears twice. Imagine what happens to a message that is replied to multiple times and not trimmed! Doing this simple thing cuts down on the length of your reply, and is especially important for those list members who are reading the list in digest form. Note: we realize that on some platforms trimming is difficult or impossible to do, but for those that can, please do so. If you need help, the moderator is happy to provide whatever assistance he/she can. Email the moderator directly at listservsmod@mccpta.com.

Political campaigning for individuals is prohibited.

- Please refrain from referring to voting for or against specific candidates on the listserv. MCCPTA is a 501(c)(3) organization, and its tax exempt status requires that it refrain from electioneering with regards to specific candidates. Penalty for electioneering is loss of exempt status; penalty for lobbying above a de minimus amount is a fine. That's why the MCCPTA bylaws are so specific about not engaging in campaign activity. It's easy to

talk about the issues without taking the next step and specifically suggesting how people should vote.

Copyright.

- Rather than post copyrighted information, provide a brief description and a website link to the information or article. Copyrighted information, including newspaper articles, should not be posted to the listserv if the copyright owner has not consented to the posting. If permission has been given to post copyrighted materials, the permission should be stated in the post. For example, "This article has been reprinted with permission from The New York Times."

Replies go to the entire list.

- Yes, everyone forgets sometimes. But, if you want to respond privately to the poster, you will need to insert their email address into the "to" for the email and delete the group address.

Help reduce the number of messages.

- Typically, it is considered bad form to reply to the entire list with a message that only says "I agree" or "well said" or "me too." Those types of messages are best sent only to the author of the message. If you want to respond to the entire list, then try to add a reason for your agreement, or some other additional thought that furthers the discussion.

Reread posts before sending.

- Since email is in itself a very impersonal type of communication, in which we are not afforded the benefit of body language or facial expressions to judge the intent or tone of the sender, we need to all be vigilant of our words. Some people use emoticons to try and add helpful "tone" information. Regardless, it is helpful to read each message knowing the sender may have meant something entirely different from the meaning you ascribe to it. In the same way, it is always a good idea to re-read you own message before you send it, to make sure it is conveying your intended meaning. Sometimes, with a hot issue, delaying the sending of your response and re-reading it hours later is a good course of action.

Focus your posts and replies.

- We are all very busy people. To reach the largest audience, keep your thoughts focused on issues and positions or you will lose your audience.

Be patient!

- Everyone needs to remember that the members of this list vary in their computer savvy and expertise. Please be patient and remember all of us make mistakes, even the most expert!

Commercial messages are prohibited.

- The listserv is not to be used to promote a personal business. It is permissible to send out messages regarding PTA fundraisers.

Finally, the moderator is here to help you with any problems you may have. Please do not hesitate to ask for help!

Section IV - MCCPTA Listservs Subscription and Unsubscription Information

June 5, 2005

Last Modified March 28, 2009

➤ **To subscribe, send a message to:**

listname-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

For example, to request a subscription to MCCPTA_Bulletin, send the message to:
MCCPTA_Bulletin-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

- Important: You will receive an auto generated message from Yahoo Groups, asking you to verify that you requested a subscription to the group. If you do not respond to the message, the moderator will never see your request. You do not have to have a Yahoo ID to do this step! Just reply to the message.
- Once you verify your request, you will get a second auto generated message requesting the info listed below. Failure to provide the requested information will result in your not being added to the listserv.
 1. Name
 2. Phone
 3. School (if any, if no school, please provide other affiliation or none)
 4. PTA Position (if any, if none, state none)

- A separate subscription request message must be sent for each listserv you wish to subscribe to, but the info provided in response to the follow up message only needs to be sent once, since the moderator manages all the lists.
- As a member of a listserv, you have options for how you receive your messages. (Please note that if you are on multiple listservs, you must specify options for each one individually.) You can:
 1. Receive the individual messages as they are sent out;
 2. Receive a digest message, which usually comes out once per day containing all messages sent in the last 24 hours, but can be sent more often if there are a lot of messages posted to the list, or not at all if there have been no messages sent to the list for 24 hours;
 3. Receive special notices only; or
 4. Go to no email and read the messages on the web. In order to do this, though, you must have a Yahoo account. Many people switch to no email when they will be away and just want to temporarily suspend their service.
- If you have a Yahoo account, then you have access to the web features of the group, including the documents in the files section. You are also able to change your own account settings. Getting a Yahoo account is free, but if you do get one, please make sure the marketing options are to your liking. The default settings for these are “yes” to your receiving all types of advertising email from Yahoo and its partners, but you can easily control this by changing your preferences.
- **If you do have a Yahoo account, then please manage your list settings yourself. If you don't know how to do that, the moderator will be happy to explain what you need to do so you can take care of it yourself.**
- If you do not have a Yahoo account, the moderator can make these switches for you, but please specify the list name and option desired.

➤ **To unsubscribe, send a message to:**

listname-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

- You have options when you want to unsubscribe from the listserv(s):
 1. If you have a Yahoo account, you can remove yourself from the listserv by going onto the listserv website and into your membership and clicking on “leave list.”
 2. If you do not have a Yahoo account, or if you don't want to bother to visit the website, at the bottom of every message are the instructions for removing yourself from the list.

- Please be aware, however, that following the unsubscribe instructions at the bottom of a message only works if you try to unsubscribe yourself by sending the request from the **exact** same email address as you were subscribed under. Some internet providers change names and still allow you to keep an old form of your email address, but it may look different to people replying to your messages. This is the biggest reason that an attempt by a subscriber to unsubscribe fails.
- Please note that sending a message to the entire list saying, “unsubscribe” will not unsubscribe you - there is a separate address for that, listed above. A message to the list will get the attention of the moderators, but there will probably be a delay in your being unsubscribed. Your last resort option is to contact a moderator and ask to be unsubscribed. The moderator’s address is found at the bottom of every message, and a direct message sent there will get through faster. If you use this option, please be patient. Also, please be sure to sign your request and state which Yahoo list you are referring to so that the moderator can be certain to unsubscribe the correct person from the correct list – the moderator is responsible for many listservs.
- One final note - it may take a day or so for the messages from the group to stop due to the Yahoo refresh schedule.

Section V - Annual Transition of Listserv Membership and Settings

April 29, 2009

MCCPTA maintains 5 primary listservs.

- Three of the listservs are purged yearly, as their membership is restricted to certain categories of PTA officers. These three lists are:
 1. MCCPTA_Board
 2. MCCPTA_Presidents
 3. MCCPTA_Treasurers
- The remaining two lists have open membership, and so no one is removed unless they either request removal, or remove themselves. These lists are:
 1. MCCPTA_Bulletin
 2. MCCPTA_Delegates

Instructions for removing yourself are found at the bottom of every list message.

- Please reference the document that describes subscription and unsubscription procedures for more details.

Transition period.

- Because of the logistics involved, the month of June has been determined to be the transition period. During this month, new subscribers are added, while existing subscribers remain on the list for continuity purposes until the end of the month (for the listservs that are purged), since most PTAs have their officers terms of office begin on July 1. If your PTA is different or you have a special circumstance, please let the moderator know.
- Please be aware that only people that have voting privileges at a Delegates Assembly may post on MCCPTA_Delegates, so it is **important** to let the moderator know if you are staying on for another year as a Delegate or President. If you have not notified the moderator by July 1, you will be changed to readonly status on the listserv.
- If you are an outgoing Delegate or President, please tell your successors about the listservs when you hold your annual elections, and point them to the information on the MCCPTA website: www.mccpta.com (and everyone should visit there anyway, for all the great info!) under "Standing Committees" and then under "Listservs Committee," which explains the various lists and how to get on them and use them.

Bouncing email addresses.

- Finally, please be aware that email addresses that are subscribed to any of the listservs and have been bouncing messages continuously for a year or more, and that have not responded to multiple reactivation requests will be deleted.

Section VI - MCCPTA Committees Listservs and Liaisons

Last modified March 28, 2009

Cultural Arts Committee

PTA Cultural Arts Chairs can share information about their programs and receive information regarding grant deadlines, showcase, cultural arts workshops, and other artistic information.

To Subscribe: PTArts-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Curriculum Committee

For PTA's Curriculum Chairpersons to get announcements about important meetings, resources, MCPS policies and news about local programming.

To Subscribe: mccpta_curriculum_committee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Gifted Child Committee

For PTA's GT (Gifted and Talented) Chairpersons to get announcements about important meetings, GT Resources, MCPS policies and news about local programming.

To Subscribe: MCCPTAGiftedChildCommittee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Grading and Reporting Committee

For MCPS PTA parents and members of the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations, discussing issues that pertain to Grading and Reporting.

To Subscribe: MCCPTAGradingAndReporting-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

High School Committee

An interactive forum for PTSA High School Presidents to express and convey information, ideas, and concerns regarding high school issues.

To Subscribe: HS_PTSA_Presidents-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Reflections Committee

To enhance communication between council and local Reflections Chairpersons about the Reflections Program. This program provides opportunities for students to express themselves and to receive positive recognition for their artistic efforts.

To Subscribe: ReflectionsMCCPTA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Special Education Committee

For PTA Special Education Chairpersons to discuss and share information about special education issues and concerns in local schools.

To Subscribe: PTA_SpecialEducationChairs_of_MC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Student Service Learning (SSL) Subcommittee

For SSL liaisons, parents who will partner with their school based SSL coordinator to increase the amount of SSL related information on the requirements, opportunities to fulfill it, and documentation procedures. Contact SSL Subcommittee Chair to get more info.

MCCPTA Committees that need liaisons at local school level

(Note, if a committee does not have a listserv, then please contact the Chair to find out how communication is achieved – Committee Chairs are listed on the MCCPTA website at:

<http://www.mccpta.net/committees.html>):

Cultural Arts
Curriculum
Gifted Child
Parent Involvement
Reflections
Safety
Special Education
Student Service Learning Subcommittee

FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary School) – <http://www.fles.org/index.html>
HOS (Hands on Science) - MCCPTA, Educational Programs, Inc. (MCCPTA-EPI)
<http://www.mccpta.com/bluebook/mccpta-epi.pdf>

Section VII

MCCPTA Listservs Summary Table

(Created May 24, 2006, last updated March 10, 2009)

<http://www.mccpta.net/listserves.html>

Part I: Listservs with Open Membership

Name of List:	MCCPTA_Delegates	MCCPTA_Bulletin
Who can join:	Anyone (subject to change – determined by DA voting body).	Anyone (subject to change – determined by DA voting body).
How to sign up:	Must request. See subscription sheet for details.	MCCPTA BOD members will be added automatically (once contact info has been received) or can request, all others must request. See subscription sheet for details.
Who can post:	People that may vote at a DA – Delegates, local PTA Presidents, members of the MCCPTA BOD.	Moderators – MCCPTA President, Listservs Subcommittee Chair and others as designated by MCCPTA President.
Used for:	New resolutions that will be introduced or voted on at a DA if online discussion is desired; questions from members of the list; questions from locals; feedback requests that need discussion; discussion of school or education issues of interest to list members; news articles of interest; non-MCCPTA press releases.	Official MCCPTA documents including but not limited to agendas, press releases, draft & approved meeting minutes, summaries of committee meetings, committee reports; announcements of MCCPTA & other meetings, forums, workshops; new or existing resolutions to be introduced or voted on at a DA if online discussion is not desired; requests for feedback that go directly to a central collection point & don't need discussion; official MCPS, MSDE, Maryland or National PTA documents or announcements.
Attachments:	no	no
Yearly purge:	no	no
Replies to (default mode):	Entire list	Message poster only
Message overlap:	There is minimal overlap between MCCPTA_Delegates and MCCPTA_Bulletin, but the MCCPTA_Presidents list, MCCPTA_Treasurers list and MCCPTA_Board list will have some overlap with the other lists.	

Legend: Officers – MCCPTA Officers (see bylaws for list); AVP – MCCPTA Area Vice President; CC – MCCPTA Cluster Coordinator; Locals – local PTA/PTSA, i.e. school unit; DA – Delegates Assembly; BOD – MCCPTA Board of Directors.

MCCPTA Listservs Summary Table (continued)

(Created May 24, 2006, last updated March 10, 2009)

<http://www.mccpta.net/listserves.html>

Part II: Listservs with Restricted Membership

Name of List:	MCCPTA Treasurers	MCCPTA Presidents	MCCPTA Board
Who can join:	Treasurers of Locals, MCCPTA Officers, AVPs, CCs. Also, MCCPTA Listservs and Website Subcommittees Chairs, MCCPTA Office Manager. Presidents of Locals may join only if the Treasurer of the same Local is already on the listserv.	Presidents of Locals, MCCPTA Officers, AVPs, CCs. Also, MCCPTA Listservs and Website Subcommittees Chairs, MCCPTA Office Manager. Local President Elect and/or Executive Vice President may join if President is already on listserv.	MCCPTA Board - Officers, AVPs, CCs, MCCPTA Committee Chairs. Also, MCCPTA Listservs and Website Subcommittees Chairs, MCCPTA Office Manager.
How to sign up:	Treasurers will be added automatically (once Blue Book info is received by MCCPTA office) or can request. Other MCCPTA Officers, AVPs, CCs, Local Presidents must request.	Presidents will be added automatically (once Blue Book info is received by MCCPTA office) or can request. Other MCCPTA Officers, AVPs, CCs, Local President Elect/Executive Vice President must request.	BOD members will be added automatically (once contact info has been received) or can request.
Who can post:	Moderators – MCCPTA President, MCCPTA Treasurer, Listservs Subcommittee Chair and others as designated by MCCPTA President.	Moderators – MCCPTA President, Listservs Subcommittee Chair and others as designated by MCCPTA President.	Any list member.
Used for:	Direct communication from MCCPTA Treasurer to Treasurers of locals.	Direct communication from MCCPTA President to Presidents of locals.	Discussion of Board matters between meetings.
Attachments:	no	no	yes
Yearly purge:	yes	yes	yes
Replies to (default mode):	Message poster only	Message poster only	Message poster only
Message overlap:	There is minimal overlap between MCCPTA_Delegates and MCCPTA_Bulletin, but the MCCPTA_Presidents list, MCCPTA_Treasurers list and MCCPTA_Board list will have some overlap with the other lists.		

Legend: Officers – MCCPTA Officers (see bylaws for list); AVP – MCCPTA Area Vice President; CC – MCCPTA Cluster Coordinator; Locals – local PTA/PTSA, i.e. school unit; DA – Delegates Assembly; BOD – MCCPTA Board of Directors.

Section VIII - Questions and Issues to Discuss and Recommendations to Consider When Starting or Running a PTA Listserv

Dec. 14, 2007

Last modified April 24, 2009

Every PTA and school community is unique, so the purpose of this document is not to tell any given community what to do, but rather to provide a starting point and ideas to consider when engaging in a dialogue at the local level. Listservs provide a powerful means of communicating information quickly and economically, but are also fraught with potential problems. Careful consideration of the implications of running a listserv can help you to avoid most problems, and to deal with ones that do occur effectively and quickly.

Important note: This document was written by a moderator whose experience and knowledge lies with Yahoo groups, after years of moderating. There are other listserv providers, but they are not mentioned here due to lack of knowledge about them beyond their existence. Therefore, please read this document with that in mind.

Questions and issues to discuss at your PTA meetings:

- To whom does the listserv belong? Before you get started, you need to decide who will maintain the list. Is it to be under the control of the PTA, the school, or a joint project?
- How will the rules be made? Who will be in charge of making the rules the list will operate under? Will it be a committee, the PTA Board of Directors, the general membership? How will new rules be proposed and put into place? How will they be enforced? What consequences will there be for those that violate the rules?
- What is the purpose of the list? Is the purpose to send out information, to hold discussions, or both?
- Who will be allowed to post?
- Will the moderator be a true moderator, or just an administrator? Will posts be moderated – i.e., will the moderator need to approve all messages before they go out? What criteria will be used in this process? How many moderators will you have?
- Will there be limits on the number of posts per person per topic?
- Who will be allowed to join the list? If membership is restricted, how will you verify identity or affiliation? Will you do a yearly purge of those that are no longer allowed to be members?

- How will list ownership be passed on as current owners or moderators move on to other schools?
- Will certain topics be off limits? Will posts be limited to school news only? Community news? Anything?
- Will posts be sent out throughout the day or combined and sent once a day or once a week?

Recommendations for your listserv, whether new or already functioning:

- Have your PTA minutes reflect all the decisions you make regarding your listserv so there is a record for future years.
- MCCPTA recommends that the PTA own the list, not the school. This avoids issues regarding control of content as well as protects the ability of the PTA to access the listserv should future legal issues force a change in MCPS/PTA collaboration. (As happened during August, 2006, with the flyer policy.)
- Try to make the name descriptive. If possible, put PTA in the name so there is no question of ownership.
- On the listserv website, or in other public places, state for all to see the purpose and ownership of the listserv. The organization that is running it determines who makes the rules.
- On a very basic level, you have two choices for your listserv:
 - It can be a discussion listserv, where everyone who is a member is allowed to post, and responses go to the entire list, or
 - It can be an announcement only listserv where only a select few can post and there is no discussion.

Each school community needs to decide for itself what fits its needs. Some people feel that without discussion, the sense of community is lost. On the other hand, discussion listservs have been known to spawn divisive arguments. If your community decides to have a listserv with discussion, then starting with a set of rules and stating them up front, and to all people who subsequently join the list, can prevent problems down the road. Examples of some rules used by local school community listservs are:

- Limits on the number of posts on a topic.
- Restricting who is permitted to post.
- Prohibiting inflammatory postings.
- Restricting topics for posting.
- Consequences for violating the listserv rules.

- Have multiple owners and moderators, but choose wisely. If you only have one owner, and something happens to the person, you may end up losing control over the list, and Yahoo will not help you. If you use a Yahoo groups listserv, their policy towards ownership is one of “hands off.” Once someone starts a group, they will not interfere regarding ownership, with the one exception of if the group is being used irresponsibly for spamming purposes. Otherwise, they will not help you with matters of ownership. Decide in advance who the primary owner and moderator will be, and if necessary, define who does what to avoid duplication of efforts and confusion.
- Train new owners and moderators, preferably before giving them privileges, or consider limiting their privileges. It is possible to make changes that cannot be recovered once someone is given full privileges.
- Consider having new owners and moderators sign an agreement regarding orderly transfer of the listserv when they leave. A sample document is provided at the end to assist you.
- Consider putting a request for email addresses to be added to your listserv on your PTA membership form.
- Be aware that if posts become too numerous, you may lose members. Be sure that subscribers are made aware of the option of getting all the messages posted in a given time period (typically each day) sent as a daily digest.

If your PTA wants to start a Yahoo groups listserv, the Listservs Moderator can provide technical assistance on the setup and help you to get the list functioning in the way you desire. Don't hesitate to ask any questions you may have.

Sample Listserv Owner/Moderator Agreement

I acknowledge that the listserv, [NAME], is owned by the [NAME] PT(S)A, and that they alone have rights to its use, control, and the use of the email addresses subscribed to it. As an owner/moderator, I serve at the request of the PT(S)A Board of Directors, and if asked to step down, will do so in a timely manner, as defined by the Board of Directors, after turning over owner/moderator privileges as instructed by the Board of Directors.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Witnessed by (member of the Board of Directors):
