

# PTO MEMBERSHIP FAQ'S

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We've had a great response to the PTO membership drive. Thank you to those who have donated so far! With the PTO Membership Drive in full swing, we've been asked a lot of good questions regarding the PTO and it's Membership Drive. There seem to be some key recurring questions that we thought we'd address here:

## **Q: What is the PTO and what does it mean to be a member?**

A: PTO stands for Parent Teacher Organization, which is made up of parents and teachers from Oak Knoll. The PTO consists of over 35 volunteer driven committees. These committees provide programming and resources both in and out of the classroom that enhance the great work of our teaching staff. These committees help make Oak Knoll a more enriching place by organizing community events like the fall and spring picnics and special friends day, organizing school field trips, coordinating volunteers for the library, lunch/recess time, and the individual classrooms, organizing the book fair and science fair, selling Otter Wear, organizing the annual Otter Run, running the hot lunch program and celebrating our teachers. This is just to name a few. It is because of the great spirit of volunteering and giving that the Oak Knoll PTO is so successful.

By becoming a member of the PTO, you are showing your support for this organization and helping to provide a better educational experience for our children. The success of the PTO is due to all the dedicated parents that provide countless hours of volunteer assistance as well as financial support. This is not something we can take for granted. With budget cuts at both a state and local level your support is even more important than ever.

## **Q: What does the PTO money get used for? Why are these funds important to the school?**

A: PTO funds are used in five major areas:

- 1) Classroom Enrichment:
  - Classroom Supplies
  - Technology
  - Professional Development
  - Science, Music, Library, P.E., and Art Supplies
- 2) Student Programs:
  - Assemblies
  - Grade level parties
  - Science Fair
  - School Spirit Events
- 3) Field Trips:
  - Except for a few exceptions all class field trips are funded entirely by the PTO
- 4) Community Events: (Helps connect parents and build community within the school)
  - Fall Fiesta
  - Spring Picnic

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## 5) Teacher Appreciation:

- Coffee Carts, Luncheons

Over the years, these areas of investment have made Oak Knoll a school that excels in academic achievement while fostering a strong parent community. Both teachers and students alike have benefitted from this support. But don't take our word for it, go ask your child's teacher(s.) Ask them how the PTO has helped create a highly productive and enriching teaching environment in which to work.

### **Q: What if I can't afford to donate \$200, can I donate less?**

A: We have been suggesting a donation of \$200, because the PTO has budgeted to spend \$200 per student. In a perfect world everyone would be able to give this amount and we would be done. In reality, some families can give more and some can't. Our goal, however, is not only to raise \$150,000 to cover the costs spent by the PTO for each child, but also to get 100% participation from all of our families. To become a member, a minimum donation of \$5 is all that is required. Give what you can. Any amount is appreciated!

### **Q: Why is 100% membership so important?**

A: First of all the PTO is an organization based on membership. Each member can, and is encouraged to, participate in the decision making process of how the PTO funds are used. It is important to hear the voices of the parents so that decisions the PTO makes actually reflect the desires of the parents. Secondly, when organizations (like the MPAEF) go out into the business community to ask for donations for school related charity, PTO participation rates are often used a key metric of how involved the parents are in the school. The higher the participation, the more likely a corporation will give money to the school.

### **Q: What if we don't raise the \$150,000?**

A: If we are unable to raise the full \$150,000, the PTO may be forced to start cutting out supplies or programs that we had budgeted to help fund. Without the PTO funds the school would have to either:

- 1) Charge each time an expense situation came up (e.g. Charge you money for each field trip – think of all the effort to collect and process this money)
- 2) Not fund an activity/item (limited class supplies, outdated technology, fewer art and science supplies)
- 3) Reduce the number of student programs offered (assemblies, science fair, etc.)

Many schools use their PTO to help conduct multiple "mini" fundraising events throughout the year (magazine sales, gift wrapping paper sales, candy sales, etc...) During the 1990's, the Oak Knoll PTO modified the PTO membership drive into a once a year fundraising drive to collect most of the money that would be needed each year. This essentially eliminated the

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need to do all the “mini” fundraisers and freed up volunteers to concentrate their volunteer effort directly with the classes and kids. If we are unable to raise the funds we need during the PTO Membership Drive, we may be forced to go back to having to hold multiple fundraisers throughout the year to support our programs.

**Q: We get asked to give money to the PTO and then we get asked again to give money to the MPAEF. Aren't they the same thing?**

A: The Oak Knoll PTO is a non-profit organization made up solely of parents and teachers from the Oak Knoll School. Donations made to the Oak Knoll PTO go directly to the Oak Knoll school and are used to purchase supplies used by our students and teachers, fund field trips students attend, subsidize school events, etc.

The Menlo Park-Atherton Education Foundation (MPAEF) is a non-profit organization committed to raising funds to support quality education at the four public schools of the Menlo Park City School District: **Laurel, Encinal, Oak Knoll, and Hillview**. The Foundation is supported by parents, community members and businesses. The money that MPAEF raises is used to pay the salaries of librarians, science specialists, foreign language programs, and much more. For more information on the MPAEF, please visit [www.mpaef.org](http://www.mpaef.org)

**Q: How do I get more involved with the PTO?**

A: In the end, this is about supporting your school. There is much more about the PTO than just the membership drive and the donations that are being requested. If you want to see PTO funds spent in other ways, I encourage you to get involved and help drive the change! Everyone's involvement is greatly appreciated! Almost all of the 35 committees are looking for volunteers and many have jobs that can be done at home and/or online. For more information about the PTO and how you can get involved, visit the Oak Knoll Website:

<http://www.oakknollpto.org/> or email Phil Ekedahl – PTO president ([philekedahl@mac.com](mailto:philekedahl@mac.com))

In summary, we ask that you consider donating to the PTO. This year's theme is the Giving Tree. Those of you that have read Shel Silversteins book the Giving Tree know that in the end the tree is left as just a stump after giving everything he had to the boy.

So we are asking for your support to help grow our tree, to extend its reach and give back to our children. As families join the PTO, our tree outside the gym will come alive and so will our classrooms.

If you have any questions regarding the PTO Membership Drive, please feel free to contact Neil Laderman ([njchome@pacbell.net](mailto:njchome@pacbell.net)) or Karen Wang ([karen@kleewang.com](mailto:karen@kleewang.com))