

# Gear up, parents – connect with your child's school

By VIRGINIA JUSTICE

PTA, PTO, parent club, booster club – they may have different names but they all share a common goal, to support schools. PTA (Parent Teacher Association) is a national group advocating for K-12 education. PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) is also a national group uniting parents and teachers in advocating for education. Many schools in our area are not a part of the national groups but instead create their own clubs to support their local schools.

Parental involvement is a critical part of educating our youth, but that involvement can have a larger scope. Empty nesters, grandparents, other relatives or school alumni can also get onboard. Parent teacher groups typically meet monthly, in addition to events they may sponsor throughout the year. Often these groups play an

integral role to ensure the school has funding to fill the gap between what taxpayers provide and what is needed. Fundraising methods



vary greatly but the target is always to ensure a quality, well-rounded education for students. If an annual membership fee poses a financial hardship, ask about a fee waiver – don't let it become a roadblock to participation.

How can you become involved in your child's school? Watch for a flyer in your "parent packet" – that stack of paperwork sent home dur-

ing the first week of school. Call your school and ask if they have a group and if not, what you can do to start one.

If your time is just too limited to join a Parent Teacher organization, you can still support your child and their school by communicating with teachers regarding your concerns, participating in parent/teacher conferences, and attending school events. Volunteer to help with a "Box Tops for Education" fun-

draising drive, which pays schools 10 cents per box top collected. A dime may not seem like much, but multiplied by thousands this money can make a difference to a school. Your help could come in the form of collecting the box tops at home and ensuring they get to your school program. Encourage family and friends to join in – they don't have to be local to support your child's school, box tops can be sent to you by mail.

The Campbell Soup Company also has a school funding program called "Labels for Education." And many stores provide funding for local schools when parents shop at that specific business – ask when you stop in.

You could offer to assist your child's teacher with Scholastic book orders. Teachers often qualify for free classroom books with every

## 2016 School Start Dates

Athena-Weston .....	Aug. 25
Echo .....	Aug. 29
Helix.....	Aug. 29
Hermiston.....	Aug. 29
Milton-Freewater	
Kindergarten .....	Sept. 6
Grades 1 to 9 .....	Aug. 29
Grades 10 to 12 .....	Aug. 30
Morrow County.....	Aug. 29
Nixyaawii	
Grade 9 .....	Aug. 23
Grades 10 to 12 .....	Aug. 24
Pendleton	
Grades K to 5 .....	Sept. 19
Grades 6 to 12.....	Aug. 29
Pilot Rock.....	Aug. 22
Stanfield .....	Aug. 22
Umatilla.....	Aug. 29

order they submit; however, putting together an order takes time. Organize a "supplies round-up" to gather supplies that teachers often pay for out of pocket – most are happy to provide you a wish list.

As state and federal funding for schools is reduced it is important for the local community to step in, whether or not you're a parent. Some school districts have a "reading with grandparents" program where retired "grandparents" come into the schools to read stories with the children.

The starting point is to communicate with your school of choice and its teachers – ask what you can do to help. Hands-on participation is ideal, but any form of support is appreciated.

*Pendleton resident Virginia Justice is a former substitute teacher. She and her husband have two college-aged daughters.*



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