Organizing Tools Packet
Who Affects Policy in Education?

Use this handout as a backgrounder or meeting material for community members who are looking to better understand the governing structures that support their schools.

U.S. Administration

- **Who:** The U.S. Department of Education, Congress
- **Access Point:** The U.S. Department of Education is responsible for the correct implementation of ESSA. You can contact the Department at (800) 872-5327 (multiple languages) or by asking a question at answers.ed.gov. You can also write to, visit, or call your representatives to express your opinion about new legislation. Find their contact information at house.gov/representatives and senate.gov.

State Administration

- **Who:** State Department of Education, Office of Public Instruction, Board of Education, Governor’s office, and state legislators (state Senate and House of Representatives).
- **Access Point:** Call, write, or visit your state representatives to learn more and express your opinion. Attend town halls, open meetings, and listening sessions hosted by state leaders.

Local Administration

- **Who:** Regional, county, or area offices of education → Local education Agencies (e.g. districts) → Schools
- **Access Point:** Request a meeting with your principal, district superintendent, or regional office representative to learn more and express your opinion.

Charter Schools, Networks, and “Authorizers”

- **Who:** Charter school leaders, national charter networks, Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), and state charter authorizers
- **Access Point:** Get in touch with the principal or leadership team at the charter school via email, on the phone, or in-person, or contact an authorizer (found on your state agency website) or national office.
Education Governance: Who Affects Policy in Education?

Advocates, Professional Associations, and Business Leaders

- **Who:** State and local research, nonprofit (e.g. community-based or civil-rights organizations), and/or representative associations (e.g. PTA or teachers’ union).

- **Access Point:** Advocates are often more involved in policy than you might expect, particularly in research and evaluation of local success and providing recommendations to policy leaders. You can inform these efforts by setting up meetings with organization leaders to learn more about what they do, share your stories, and push for action.

Alternative Education Leadership

- **Who:** District leaders, for-profit companies, contractors, or non-profit public health centers that run alternative education programs for struggling students (such as those who have been expelled).

- **Access Point:** Start by meeting with the school’s principal or leadership team. State and district leaders are most often in charge of contracts with alternative education leaders and can impact decisions about which schools are available to students and what services can be expected at each school.

Philanthropy and Grant-Making Organizations

- **Who:** State and local foundations

- **Access Point:** Community organizations are often funded by philanthropic organizations. Working with philanthropic leaders to improve outcomes, consolidate or collaborate with other local grantees, and better align out-of-school services with on-site services in schools can be an effective way to build up community advocacy and have an impact on education.

Check out our **Template: Letter to Decision-Makers** for what to say or write when you get in touch!

1. What is the issue/question that you want to talk more about?

2. What level of governance will help to solve your issue/question?

3. Who is one person or office that you will contact to help you with this issue/question? How will you contact them? Is there someone who can help you, like a peer organizer, or other trusted ally?

(Organizers! Make sure to provide contact information for local advocates, your local school board or district office, etc.)
How to Help Your Administrators Better Engage with You
Here is a list of recommendations that you can share with school and district administrators to promote greater community involvement.

Reach the Unreached
Prioritize the needs, participation, and leadership of communities that have historically been marginalized and underserved by political decision-making processes.

- **Conduct leadership training**: Develop leadership trainings for school staff and the broader school community to grow existing and emerging leaders. For example, hold diversity and inclusion trainings for school administrators, families, and community groups.

- **Start with a question**: Begin by welcoming families and communities and inviting input, rather than beginning with workshops, information sessions, or take-home pamphlets. It can help to enlist the support of trusted messengers like widely known and liked family members, community organizers, teachers, and students themselves.

Show Your Work
Make your decision-making process transparent: all communities should be able to easily see when and how to participate, as well as how participation is valued and has real impact.

- **Gather trusted information**: Invest in evaluation and data efforts that include community members, researchers, and data experts: it is essential that decisions are made based on accurate and relevant information. For example, enlist the support and leadership of trusted families and community members to collect this information (e.g. conduct a school climate survey).

- **Check for understanding**: After input sessions, leadership team meetings, and other events, enlist a few leaders to make sure that the information learned and decisions made were accurately reflected in the notes and follow-up action.

Stick With It
Engagement efforts must begin at the earliest planning stages, continue throughout implementation in structured, regular ways, and occur at all levels (federal, state, and local).

- **Invite difficult conversation**: Do not sidestep the hardest conversations; conflict is healthy and addressing difficult issues is essential for breaking down the biggest barriers to trust, collaboration, and success. This might mean conducting a survey among teachers and families to learn more about grievances and holding a school-wide learning session where teachers and families are able to talk through their concerns in person with each other and school leadership. These conversations can benefit from outside moderation.
How to Help Your Administrators Better Engage with You

Stick With It - CONTINUED

• **Use/Create community centers:** Partner with community centers of all types (faith-based centers, libraries, community/youth centers, etc.) to expand reach for recruitment into leadership and to share back about progress. To go further, it can be helpful to create a family or community center within a school. Creating designated, safe, and inviting physical space for communities can go a long way to encouraging their involvement.

Maximize Your Resources

**Work with outside partners to strengthen your engagement efforts.** This can add resources, staff, intellectual capital, and new perspectives.

  • **Ask community members for help in making materials:** Make materials with partners and community leaders that are accessible, available (in print), etc. Involve community members and families early in the process, and make sure that there are opportunities for revision of materials over time.

  • **Focus involvement on student achievement:** Do not limit family, students, or community involvement to fundraising or chaperoning. For example, create an agreement among community members and leaders that is revisited over time that includes specific student, family, teacher, community partner, and school leadership contributions (**Check out Project Appleseed for more resources on family involvement at projectappleseed.org**)

Double Down

**Pull together and analyze community feedback from separate and parallel efforts to identify areas of agreement, amplify the voices of the underserved, and build support for reform.**

  • **Set up a leadership team:** Develop inside/outside leadership teams with representation from the community, including students and families. Additionally, moderate leadership team meetings with third-party partners to promote balance.

  • **Involve families and students in hiring:** Involve community members in staffing and leadership decisions. For example, invite parents to interview teachers that might teach their children and give them the opportunity to ask their own questions.

Add your own!

Check out the NEA’s Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education and Partners for Each and Every Child's Process and Protest for more!

Check out our **Template: Letter to Decision-Makers** for what to say or write when you get in touch!
Improve Your School: What to Advocate For

How can school and district administrators change our communities and schools to better offer students what they need and support their success? Here are a few ideas that you can advocate for with your school and district administrators:

School Teachers and Staff:

- **Communities help hire staff:** Write job descriptions/hiring materials in collaboration with parents, students, and school staff (e.g. principals, teachers, counselors, custodians), and involve parents and students in interviews.

- **Community helps train staff:** Create a training program for new hires that includes conversations with families, students, and leaders; and make peer/community mentorship mandatory for new hires to make sure new staff are supported and integrated into the community.

- **Content and “culture” training:** Offer additional professional development and training for staff around content and culture that includes families, students, and other school community members.

- **Hire new staff:** Hire new staff, like counselors, social workers, bilingual teachers, special education educators, coaches, family engagement coordinators, internship coordinators, college and career advisors, and health professionals (nurses, psychiatrists, nutritionists).

New and Different Learning Opportunities for Students:

- **More and different classes:** Add additional courses to the schedule for all students (e.g. performing and visual arts, psychology, civics, coding/computer programming, economics, sexual health).

- **High-level classes:** Offer and support student access to advanced coursework, such as online college credit courses or Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

- **Internships, field-trips:** Connect with community businesses or nonprofit organizations to offer internship opportunities or off-site educational experiences (field trips to museums, factories, aquariums, libraries, etc.).

This is a Tool from the Engage for Education Equity Toolkit. Find more at partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity.
School Culture:

- **Introduce positive discipline practices**: Implement Restorative Justice practices or Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and connect students with mental health professionals, counselors, and mentors.

- **Reduce harmful discipline practices**: Reduce out-of-school suspensions and expulsions and/or reduce police presence in schools.

- **Community events, councils, and leadership**: Create more meaningful opportunities to bring school communities together in person.

Student Health:

- **Better school breakfast and lunch programs**: Advocate for more nutritious and better tasting food for kids.

- **Recess and outdoor play**: Provide more time for recess, upgrade your school playground (check out Kaboom! for help at kaboom.org), or advocate for more afterschool activities that support all students—no matter their ability or gender.

**What Else?**

School improvement is not one-size-fits-all, and the best thing you can do to support your child is to advocate for what you care about.

If you are looking for materials to share with your community, check out these great resources:

- **Evidence for ESSA** is a website with math and reading programs rated according to how well they work! evidenceforessa.org

- **The Dignity in Schools Campaign** has resources for improving discipline policies at your school dignityinschools.org/take-action

- **Community Schools** are a great way to begin linking efforts and growing your resources. Learn more at learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-effective-school-improvement-report, and check out the infographic.

**Add your Own!**

- What would you like to change about your school?

- What programs, classes, or committees would you like to be involved in?

- What does your school do well? Can it grow or be available to more students/families/staff?

This is a Tool from the *Engage for Education Equity Toolkit*. Find more at partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity.
# Improve Your School: Where to “Write it Down”

*Use this page to learn what plans you can affect, and who in the education community is responsible for those plans. Use this on Step 4 of the School Improvement Cycle: Write it Down!*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Can I Change?</th>
<th>Who do I Work With?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>With My School</strong></td>
<td><em>School</em> principals and charter school directors are typically those in charge of school handbooks, websites, mission statements, and other school-level decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The School Mission Statement or School Handbook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Support and Improvement Plan (for schools where certain students are struggling)</td>
<td>Targeted Support and Improvement Plans are written by a <em>school</em>-level team, including the school principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>With My District</strong></td>
<td><em>Most ESSA funds are distributed to states. LEAs (charter schools, districts, regional offices, or other local education agencies) then apply to the state for these funds. Work with the <em>district</em> Federal Programs Officer and/or district Superintendent on these applications.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Local Consolidated Plan (District Funding Application under ESSA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plan (for schools that are struggling overall)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Budget</td>
<td><em>School budgets are typically written and/or approved by the local school board, <em>district</em> leaders, or charter school directors</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Assessment</td>
<td><em>Required needs assessments are provided by the the <em>district</em> office. Your state education agency may provide a template.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>With My State</strong></td>
<td><em>State ESSA plans, which include standards and assessments, are written and approved at the <em>state</em> level by the State Education Agency (SEA).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards or assessments (state level decisions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State ESSA Plan</td>
<td>Work with the <em>state</em> superintendent’s office, the Governor’s office, or state legislators to make changes to the state ESSA plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>With Philanthropy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Grant-making organizations</strong> can be found at the national level, state level, and locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant applications (private or non-profit)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Template: Letter to Decision-Makers

Use this template to write to your school principal, school board member, district office staff, superintendent, or other local official. You can also use this as a script for calling by phone or writing an email.

[Recipient name & address]

Dear [recipient name]:

I am a [parent/guardian/community member] at [name of school]. I care about [my child’s/ our children’s] education and I want to be involved in making sure they get what they need.

I’m writing to find out how I can be more involved in efforts to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) at our school. Every child deserves the chance to get a great education, and I’m excited that ESSA gives us all an opportunity to think about how to make that happen.

ESSA requires states and schools to give parents and community members a way to participate, and I want to be involved.

In particular, I’d like to be involved in how our state and school will be handling [issue that’s important to you].

This issue is important to me because [tell your story!].

As a [parent/guardian/community member], I know how important it is to be involved in helping students succeed. I look forward to hearing from you about how I can be involved in the ESSA process.

Sincerely,

[Your name]  
[Your contact information]

School Leaders: Who to Talk/Write to

- School Principal  
- School Board Members  
- District Superintendent  
- District Title I officer  
- District “School Improvement” Team  
- Governor’s Office Education Policy Director  
- Education Nonprofit Policy Directors

Find the contact information you are looking for on your school or district’s website, by calling your school administrator’s office, by asking your child’s teacher, or by asking a local community organization for help.

This is a Tool from the Engage for Education Equity Toolkit. Find more at partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforedequity
ESSA’s Local Engagement Requirements

These are the parts of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) where local-level stakeholder engagement is required. It is important to keep in mind that while the following engagement opportunities are explicitly outlined in ESSA, all efforts to support schools and students will be more effective, meaningful, and lasting with explicit and ongoing community engagement.

Consolidated Plans (Title I)

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must engage a variety of stakeholders in developing their Consolidated LEA Plan, and must periodically review and revise this plan [Section 1112(a)(1)(A)].

The Consolidated LEA Plan must describe strategies to be used to effectively transition students to postsecondary education and career, which could include coordination with institutions of higher education, employers, or other local partners. The plan must also describe how the LEA will coordinate with early childhood education programs [Section 1112(b)(6)].

School Improvement (Title I)

Schools Identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement

• LEAs must develop Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plans for all schools identified by the State and must partner with stakeholders to develop and implement these plans [Section 1111(d)(1)(A)].

Schools Identified for Targeted Support and Improvement

• LEAs must monitor each Targeted Support and Improvement Plan developed by identified schools and relevant stakeholders [Section 1111(d)(2)(B)] and these plan provisions to ensure that, among other requirements, schools identify eligible children most in need of services under targeted support and improvement [Section 1112(b)(7)].

LEA plan provisions must include strategies for implementing effective parent and family engagement strategies; supporting, coordinating, and integrating with early childhood education programs; and facilitating effective transitions to high school and postsecondary institutions [Section 1112(b)(7)]. LEAs must also support participating schools in planning and implementing family engagement strategies, potentially collaborating with other stakeholders with expertise in this area [Section 1116].

Weighted Funding Flexibility Pilot (Title I)

IF PARTICIPATING: With regard to Flexibility for Equitable Per-Pupil Funding, LEAs must consult with stakeholders in developing and implementing the local flexibility demonstration for weighted per-pupil funding [Section 1501(d)(1)(G)].
**Teachers and Leaders (Title II)**

LEAs must consult with a range of stakeholders in developing applications for Title II formula funds, seek advice on how to improve activities, and describe how data and ongoing consultation will be used to continuously improve Title II local activities [Section 2101(b)(2)].

**English Learners (Title III)**

LEAs must use Title III funds for parent and family engagement activities related to English learners, among other required uses of funds [Section 3115(c)(3)(A)].

For subgrants serving immigrant students, LEAs (and other eligible entities) must also describe how they will promote parent, family, and community engagement, and how they consulted with stakeholders in developing their Title III plans [Section 3115(g)(3)].

**Supporting 21st Century Schools (Title IV)**

LEAs must consult stakeholders in developing a Title IV plan for Safe and Healthy Schools and Well-Rounded Education, and consult them on an ongoing basis while implementing strategies and programs under Title IV [Section 4106(c)(1)], and LEAs may receive training in all family engagement policies, programs, and activities through partnerships with family engagement centers [Section 4501(1)].

An LEA may:

- use Safe and Healthy Schools funds to designate a coordinator to engage the community by building partnerships and strengthening relationships and supports between schools and communities [Section 4108(5)(H)];
- be consulted in the development of needs and assets analysis for the Promise Neighborhoods Program [Section 4624(a)(4)(B)]; and/or
- be included in an applicant’s explanation of how a Promise Neighborhood will establish and continue family and community engagement including involving representative participation from the neighborhood, among other activities [Section 4624(a)(9)(A)].

Additionally, Full-Service Community Schools applications that include broad stakeholders – which may include LEAs – receive priority [Section 4625(b)(2)].