

Grassroots *lobbying*

A handbook for
school board members

edited by

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Preface

President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “Politics ought to be the part-time profession of every citizen.” A half-century later, his words remind us of the need for everyone to participate in the political process and help shape public policy.

It is simply not enough to vote or sign a petition. Bending the ears of our elected officials requires the collective voice and vision of educated constituents who communicate through a grassroots program. Legislators rely on a number of different sources, including lobbyists, but they are most attentive when they hear from their constituents.

If legislators do not hear from you on legislation affecting your interests, they can assume you are “OK” with the decisions that are being made in Columbus. Meeting regularly with legislators will ensure they know how you stand on issues and assist them in making informed decisions. With the challenges we face in public education, it is now more important than ever to establish a grassroots advocacy program. OSBA

has created this handbook as a step-by-step guide on how to get a grassroots advocacy program started in your area.

Also included in this book is a guide on how to host a candidates’ night during election years. Hosting a candidates’ night provides a valuable community service and sends a powerful message to those running for the Ohio General Assembly or Congress that your community will make an informed decision on who to support and will hold them accountable for their performance in office. Community leaders, school board members and school administrators are poised to strongly influence who will be making the crucial decisions on public education in Ohio — if you are willing to get involved.

OSBA strongly encourages you to take a leading role in organizing one of these forums. As community leaders, you are well positioned to mobilize your community around this effort. We must remember that we are all advocates for Ohio’s school children. Let’s get involved and find out “who speaks for children?”

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We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the League of Women Voters for allowing OSBA to use portions of its *Voters Service Handbook for Ohio*.

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Communicating with legislators



here are many ways to communicate with your legislators. You can send a fax, e-mail or letter. You can even visit for a one-on-one meeting. All of these actions contribute towards

communicating with your legislators. However, to complete your grassroots advocacy efforts, it is important to consider developing a forum where school officials and legislators can come together to share information and consider public policy.

A priority of a grassroots program is to develop close, personal relationships with your lawmakers; relationships built on trust and mutual understanding. Your legislators will listen to and seriously consider your concerns, and will turn to you for advice on issues that affect education. It is this feedback from their constituents that help them make informed decisions that are best for their local communities.

Here is a grassroots advocacy resource kit with step-by-step guidelines for putting together a local forum with legislators to share and express your views on critical public education issues. When you consider the fact that term limits have drastically reduced the institutional memory of legislators, it is clear why meeting with legislators on a regular basis is so important.

How to get started

Starting up a grassroots advocacy program takes time and organization. The first meeting should not include legislators. The initial meeting serves as an organizational endeavor to canvass interest and allow participants to bring their thoughts and ideas to the table. If you want your grassroots program to thrive, it is critical to have a well-structured, goal-oriented program.

Many times, school districts will start a grassroots program with much success. However, as school officials retire or leave their positions for various reasons, it is common for these programs to simply die off. That is why it is important to continue to get new people involved at the local level. You want to establish something that will outlast turnover!

Regionalize

To increase the size of your initiative, it's a good idea to regionalize your forum. We suggest teaming up with other school districts in your

county-wide area or by all the districts in the educational service center (ESC) or career center. Many legislators have constituents in numerous school districts.

We also suggest talking to your ESC superintendent or career center superintendent to assist in exploring if other school districts would be interested in starting up a grassroots advocacy group. The OSBA legislative division can assist you in contacting other school district officials in your area, including sending out invitations and locating a site for the meeting. Again, an ESC or career center facility can provide a good location that is familiar to all school districts that encompass the area.

Who should be invited?

There are many ways to approach who should be the regular participants in your grassroots advocacy group. Some groups have legislative liaisons or board presidents serve as the main participants of the meeting. Others have as many school officials as possible participate — school board members, superintendents and treasurers. Ultimately, whatever you believe is in the best interest of your area is the right decision.

Invitations

Once a date and facility have been confirmed, it is important to send out invitations to this event. Send invitations at least one month in advance. The OSBA legislative division can assist you in collecting contact information. A sample invitation memo can be found on page 15.

Checklist 1

How to get started

- Talk to fellow board members and school officials to see if interest exists.
- Talk to ESC and or career center superintendent to seek regional support.
- Establish date and location of initial meeting.
- Send invitations (contact OSBA for names and addresses).

The first meeting

The purpose of the first grassroots advocacy meeting is to get organized. Participants will be anxious to share their thoughts and experiences

in dealing with legislators, so there will be plenty of dialogue concerning issues that affect your local school districts.

A moderator should be selected to oversee the meeting and supply the agenda. The moderator could be the ESC or career center superintendent, or a board member. The OSBA legislative division staff members also provide a “Grassroots 101” presentation and will gladly make this presentation at your meeting.

Agenda

The agenda should consist of an introduction on “What is grassroots?” An open forum should follow so participants can discuss their ideas on what this program should look like. A good way to get people to open up is to have them fill out a questionnaire to discuss strategies and goals. Finally, the meeting should conclude with a discussion on “next steps.”

Questionnaire

Once you discuss the fundamentals of grassroots advocacy, have your participants fill out a questionnaire. The purpose of the

questionnaire is to survey the participants on their top legislative priorities and to see if there is interest in starting up a grassroots program. A sample questionnaire can be found on page 16.

Next steps

Once participants are provided with the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns, you will want to consider how this group is going to be organized. The next chapter will provide you with “model” grassroots programs. These programs represent how your colleagues around the state are conducting their grassroots programs. These will serve as a guide in assisting you in developing what your program is going to look like.

Checklist 2

- ___ Create an agenda.
- ___ Review “Grassroots Lobbying”.
- ___ Discuss questionnaire.
- ___ Decide on moderator.
- ___ Talk about next steps.
- ___ Set time date and location for next meeting.

Model grassroots programs



There are many programs in existence that have been serving education advocates very well over the years.

Some are very formal, some are much more relaxed. Some meet monthly, some meet on a less frequent basis. These programs were individualized by the participants to fit their own needs. Feel free to use the models as a template and add your own personal touches. It is important to develop a mechanism to meet regularly with your legislator.

Model 1

Meeting frequency

- meet on an “as needed” basis.

Participants

- superintendents, treasurers, school board members and members of the business community;
- legislators.

Atmosphere

- formal setting;
- dinner served;
- strict timetable set by ESC superintendent.

Agenda

- committee of educators decide on list of questions;
- committee finalizes topics/questions for meeting;
- sent to legislators and attendees ahead of time.

Meeting set up

- moderator asks questions;
- each legislator allowed to speak one to three minutes;
- school board members given floor for 20 minutes to ask additional questions;
- legislators conclude with three minutes on the topic of their choice.

Model 2

Meeting frequency

- monthly.

Participants

- legislative liaisons (they are permitted to bring guests, such as, other board members, treasurer, superintendent);
- legislators;
- state school board member.

Atmosphere

- informal setting;
- snacks served;
- moderated by ESC superintendent.

Agenda

- decided by ESC superintendent;
- sent to attendees in advance.

Meeting set up

- discuss current legislative issues;
- open forum — issues from the group;
- issues brought up by the legislators;
- always set next meeting date — ensure maximum attendance.

These models should provide you with a foundation on what a successful and long-lasting grassroots program looks like. Use these models as a starting point and feel free to adjust and expand upon them.

How your organization works

When setting up your new grassroots program, make sure the organizational structure is put in writing. Again, it is important that your program has longevity. You will be most successful in your grassroots lobbying efforts if you have consistency and long term goals. Develop a document that contains a description of how the program works, a listing of how the program is organized, and a measurement which defines success for the program. The goals and objectives should be based on the collective answers from your questionnaire.

The program's mission statement

Another important component to defining your group is to develop a mission statement. A good mission statement should accurately explain why your organization exists and what it hopes to achieve in the future. A sample mission statement could look like this: "The Advocacy Group's mission is to communicate with and engage our communities and state legislators on issues that affect the quality of education for our public schools."

Have group discussions about ideas and concepts and let one or two individuals draft the wording before submitting a reworked version for the group to respond to. It is important to circulate the draft statements a few times to the participants. The OSBA legislative division can assist.

Checklist 3

- Review grassroots model.
- Develop program structure and goals.
- Create a mission statement.
- Assign these duties to one or two individuals.
- Circulate draft documents to participants.
- Finalize structure based on feedback.

Preparing for and meeting with legislators

Once the organizational structure of the group is firmly in place, discuss the agenda of your first meeting with your legislators. The priority of the first meeting is to introduce your group to the legislators and share basic issues that you would like to discuss and goals you would like to achieve. The tone of the meeting should be positive, but still emphasize that you

are committed to making a difference and holding the legislators accountable for their decisions. You want to create an environment that is welcoming and open, and you want to make sure the legislators come back!

Agenda

Since the first meeting is more introductory, keep the agenda simple. The agenda should be sent in advance so that all participants know what to expect.

Have the moderator start introductions and explain what your group is all about. Once everyone gets acquainted, the moderator will begin the discussion. When deciding what you want to talk about, pick no more than three topics. For instance, you may want to ask them questions about current legislation or hot education topics such as the education budget or community schools. A list of sample questions can be found on page 17.

Open discussion

When you are finished with the more structured and formal parts of the meeting, allow some time for participants and legislators to speak. However, it is critical that the moderator limit this discussion to maintain the focus and enthusiasm of the group. It can sometimes be frustrating if the meeting gets off topic or a few people begin to dominate the program.

Invitations

Send out invitations at least one month in advance. Legislators' calendars fill up very fast. See sample on page 19.

Conclusion

Set the date for the next meeting before you leave. The more people that can come to your meeting, the more you will accomplish!

Checklist 4

- Create an agenda.
- Decide on three topics to discuss.
- Send agenda and invitation one month in advance.
- Start meeting with introductions by moderator.
- Provide for open discussion.
- Set date for next meeting.

Suggestions on how to get involved



This toolkit was created to make it easier to develop a comprehensive grassroots advocacy program.

However, there are many ways to get involved — simple or complex. Here's a quick list on easy ways to become an advocate for your public education:

- Provide OSBA your e-mail address to stay informed.
- Give a monthly legislative report at your school board meeting. Consult the *Link* monthly publication for legislative liaisons, the *Facts in a Flash* e-mail update or the *Legislative Report* in the *Briefcase* for the most up-to-date information.
- Respond to “Calls to Action” provided by OSBA. Call or e-mail legislators and explain the local impact of the legislation with specific data if possible. Ask for a response from the legislator.
- Forward “Calls to Action” to others in your school district.
- Invite legislators to a school building; highlight a successful program that would interest them and let them know how important their support is to the program. Consider media coverage of the event.
- Join *Kids PAC*, OSBA’s political action committee.
- Write an op-ed editorial or letter to the editor in

your local newspaper; discuss legislative topics impacting your school district. Close your letter or op-ed by asking readers to contact their legislators about the issue.

- Organize a breakfast meeting or coffee with legislators; invite other school districts to attend.
- Testify in front of the legislature during a committee hearing. Real-life testimonial goes a long way.
- Call your legislators on an issue or bill. Be prepared to give a locally based rationale for your position. Ask the legislator for his or her support of your position.
- Attend the Annual State Legislative Conference held every spring and hosted by OSBA, the Buckeye Association of School Administrators and Ohio Association of School Business Officials in Columbus. Make an appointment with your legislators for that afternoon to meet in their Columbus office. Take a school district team of administrators and school board members for extra emphasis.
- ALWAYS contact the OSBA legislative division when you communicate with legislators. This assists your lobbyists when they speak with legislators and provides us with a complete advocacy picture.

General information



This information will assist you in obtaining the legislative schedule, bill information and various other tools available on the Internet.

The legislative schedule

By law, the General Assembly begins in January in each odd-numbered year and ends in December of each even-numbered year. Members are elected in even-numbered years. Senators are elected to four-year terms and are limited by law to two consecutive terms. House of Representative terms last two years with a limit of four, consecutive terms. The governor is prohibited by law from serving more than two consecutive four-year terms.

The following gives some idea of the general schedule kept by the Ohio Senate and Ohio House.

Odd-numbered years

January 1/June 30

House and Senate in session.

Events: Committee chairmanships are announced and general committee assignments are made in January. Governor introduces his Executive Budget (suggested spending and tax levels for the next two fiscal years) in January. Final budget must be passed by July 1. Much of the session's activity of legislation occurs during this period and at the beginning of the second calendar year of the session.

July 1/mid-November

House and Senate in recess.

Events: Some voting session days for "Housekeeping" matters.

Mid-November/mid-December

House and Senate in session.

No major events. Sometimes a period of intensive committee activity.

Even-numbered years

January/mid-May

House and Senate in session.

Events: Budget Correction Bill and Capital Construction bills introduced and considered. Candidates for House and Senate seats must file nominating petitions with the Boards of Elections 75 days before the primary.

Mid-May/November

House and Senate in recess.

Events: Campaigning for (re)election.

Rare voting sessions, mostly for political issues. General Election held in November.

Time to meet with legislators in district

Mid-November/mid-December

House and Senate in session.

Events: "Lame Duck" session. Often the time during which politically sensitive issues are dealt with.

Internet and the World Wide Web

The General Assembly has established home pages on the World Wide Web for both the House and the Senate (www.legislature.state.oh.us). This Web site address includes e-mail addresses for all legislators and Internet access to all pending legislation.

State legislation

Legislative Information Office

From the Columbus area call 466-8842 or call toll-free (800) 282-0253. This office can give you the status of a bill, i.e., whether the bill is in committee, passed one chamber, etc. You must know the number of the bill in order to find out its status.

House and Senate Journals

These provide an account of the events that occurred the previous day on the House and Senate floor. The *Journal* contains a listing of the roll call votes on the bills before the House and Senate. They are issued on a daily basis when the General Assembly is in session and can be obtained from the bill room.

Legislative Status Sheet

This sheet gives the status information on a bill. It consists of the bill's number, sponsors and any action taken on the bill as of the printing date. This can be obtained from the bill room. It is updated every week while the General Assembly is in session and monthly when they are not.

Legislation

The best way to obtain a copy of a bill is to call your representative if it is a House bill or your

senator if it is a Senate bill. By calling your legislator's office, his or her staff is aware that you are concerned with the issue and you have initiated a very important relationship. You can also ask that they send you the Legislative Services Commission (LSC) analysis of a bill. They are often easier to understand than the actual "legalese" contained in the bill.

OSBA resources

While the task of being an effective advocate will rest on your shoulders, you won't be in it alone. OSBA's Division of Legislative Services will assist you in all areas of the legislative process. The Division of Legislative Services produces three publications that cover the General Assembly.

One, which is specifically directed to legislative liaisons is called *The Link*. This monthly publication contains background information on bills and events currently before the Ohio Legislature. *The Link* also includes "Calls to action," where legislative liaisons are requested to take specific actions that will help the Division of Legislative Services accomplish association goals.

You are on your way!

Hopefully, this guidebook will help you organize a successful grassroots advocacy program. How your legislators view public schools will directly impact the direction of education policy for years to come. Before you know it, you will be meeting regularly with legislators, building relationships, and accomplishing the goals you set for your grassroots advocacy group.

We can't reiterate enough the importance you

The *Legislative Report* is published twice a month, as part of the *OSBA Briefcase*, when the General Assembly is in session. In addition to reports on current legislative matters, it contains lists of new bills and bills that have been passed.

The third publication is provided through the Internet via e-mail, called *Facts in a Flash*. It will keep you up-to-date on legislative proposals and committee hearings that impact public education. To receive *Facts in a Flash*, contact the Division of Legislative Services. The e-mail updates are sent every Friday afternoon when the General Assembly is in session.

In addition, legislative issues are frequently featured in both the *OSBA Journal* and *Communiqués*. When legislation is passed and signed into law, OSBA will publish the information on our Web site to help your board understand the bill and to explain what actions they need to take to implement it. In addition to these services, our staff members are available for phone consultation. If you need more information, or you have questions, call OSBA and we'll make sure you're referred to the proper staff person.

have in achieving OSBA's goals. Without your support and help, we can't do our job as effectively.

In countless ways, decisions made in Columbus affect the decision you make as a board member. You are an elected board member. You have a right to have an impact on what those decisions are. You have a duty to do all you can to make certain those decisions are sound education policy.

Candidates' Night Kit

Another effective grassroots tool is to make one of your regular meetings a Candidates' Night.

State representatives are up for election every two years and state senators every four years. During an election year, utilize the base that you have created within your grassroots advocacy program and host a candidates' night.

The best way to learn a candidate's views and positions on education is to host a "Meet the Candidates" event. Invite those running for Congress, the Ohio General Assembly, Ohio Supreme Court and other statewide offices to address education issues before an audience of voters. The candidates will appreciate the exposure and the voters will be informed when they go to the polls.

Since the primary purpose of a candidate's night is to inform local voters, the planning and preparation for this meeting is much more complex than a regular grassroots meeting. The following guidelines will help you provide for an unbiased forum that is fair to all candidates. Feel free to expand upon these suggestions to best meet the needs of your community, school district and local voters.

There is no legal obstacle in hosting a candidates' night. Ohio Revised Code Section 3313.78 permits boards of education to hold political meetings on school grounds for the discussion of public questions and issues. The public must be invited and expending public funds for a public purpose is permitted by law. Any district hosting a candidates' night should consult the district's own policy concerning the use of school buildings.

How to get started

Cosponsors

To increase the size of your audience, it's a good idea to get cosponsors for your event. Your local parent teachers association is a great place to start. The League of Women Voters has experience organizing candidates' nights and may be a valuable resource and partner. If you involve local businesses, you will have to decide how broad you want the questions for the candidates

to be. If you want them to be only about education issues, then you may be limited in asking other cosponsors. It all depends on how you want to publicize your candidates' night, whether you want it to be "Meet the candidates" or "What do the candidates have to say about education?"

Cosponsors can supply ushers, a high school band (band boosters can be cosponsors), refreshments, publicity and printing. Be sure to recognize all cosponsors in the program and from the podium that night.

Picking a date

Plan to hold your candidates' night during September or the first three weeks in October. Consider absentee voting when selecting a date. Before setting the date, contact the county headquarters of the Republican and Democratic parties to make sure that it is available. Political party headquarters may be willing to invite the candidates for you and assist in other ways. Ask that your forum be put on their calendars.

Choosing a site

The auditorium, cafeteria or library of a centrally located high school or career center would make a great location for your forum. What better place to discuss education issues than in a public school?

Decorations such as flags and bunting are fun, but unless someone is anxious to head up this project, decorations are not necessary. Maps to the school and signs in the building directing the speakers and audience to the auditorium are necessary.

Test the lighting and sound system ahead of time and have identification signs (visible from the back of the room) for the candidates and moderator. Make sure there is easy access to the stage (including a ramp for handicap access). The moderator's table or lectern should be off to the side of the stage and the candidates' table should be center stage. If possible, supply a microphone for every two people at the table and a floor microphone for questions, if appropriate. Provide water for all speakers and paper and pencils.

If you will be providing refreshments following the program, set them up in a separate room. An informal time for refreshments provides

voters and candidates an opportunity to speak one-on-one, and allows school board members and school administrators the opportunity to develop that all-important relationship with their legislator.

Arranging for a moderator

Usually a moderator is chosen for the following attributes:

- stage presence,
- ability to make a quick decision,
- tact and sense of fair play,
- reasonable sense of humor,
- gracious manner while being firm,
- political neutrality.

The choice of a moderator is very important. One suggestion is to ask a media professional such as a radio or TV newscaster. An advantage of having someone from the media is additional publicity. A local judge, or someone from the League of Women Voters or the business community, is also a good option. To be unbiased, we recommend someone outside of the education community.

It is appropriate for the board president to welcome the candidates and audience, and to introduce the moderator. The moderator then takes over for the remainder of the program and plays a key role in the success of the meeting. Be sure the moderator is aware of any sensitive issues that may arise. He or she needs to know the rules for the forum, a detailed time schedule, the length of time for responses and the correct pronunciation of each candidate's name.

General tips for the moderator are included on page 14.

Invitations

Send invitations at least one month in advance. Candidates' calendars fill up very fast just prior to an election. As mentioned previously, take any help the Democratic or Republican party office is willing to give you to aid in inviting candidates. Confirm all invitations in writing, along with the schedule, rules, biography form and directions to the site. See sample on page 20.

Make sure you invite all candidates, including those registered as independent. Contact the OSBA legislative division to find out the candidates in your area.

Candidate biographies

Along with the invitation you send to each candidate, enclose a request for biographical information (a sample is included on page 21).

When this information is returned, compile a candidates' guide to be distributed to members of the audience. This will eliminate the need for lengthy introductions and more time can be spent on the issues. Regardless, make sure the moderator has detailed information on the candidates ahead of time.

Getting publicity

After you've gone to all this hard work to organize a candidates' night, it would be a shame if you had poor attendance. You need to get the word out about your event. Prepare a news release and mail it to the local papers two weeks in advance of your event. Weekly papers need more lead time than dailies. Once you've sent the news release, follow up the week before the event with a phone call to the news editor, and invite a reporter and photographer to attend, along with local TV and radio stations.

School newsletters should include an announcement of the meeting and fliers should be sent home with students. If you have announcement boards in front of your schools, start posting the notice two weeks ahead of time for citizens driving by.

A sample news release and flier are on pages 22 and 23.

Developing rules for the debate

Enclose a list of the ground rules (see page 14) and a schedule of the meeting (see page 13) with the invitation to the candidates. The rules ensure fairness for everyone. You will have to decide if you will permit substitute speakers for those candidates who cannot attend the forum. Will a statement from an absent candidate, read by the moderator, be allowed?

A timekeeper is a good idea to help ensure fairness.

The format

Assign a host or hostess for each candidate. This is a good job for school board members. When the candidate arrives, the host or hostess greets the candidate, gives the candidate a name tag and generally makes him or her feel at ease.

The band can be playing (optional) as people are being seated. The board president should welcome the audience, lead the Pledge of Allegiance, ask the candidates to take their places on stage and introduce the moderator.

The moderator introduces the candidates and gives each candidate (in alphabetical order) the opportunity to come to the podium to make

an (timed) opening statement. Following the statements, the moderator will ask the prepared questions, alternating which candidate answers first.

Following the prepared questions, audience questions will be taken, either verbally or in written form. Each candidate will then have the opportunity to make a timed, closing statement.

Upon completion of the closing statements, the board president should take the microphone, thank the candidates, moderator, cosponsors and audience, and then invite everyone for refreshments, if applicable.

If you decide to permit candidates to distribute campaign literature, this should be done following the formal program and during the refreshment period. Campaign literature can be placed on tables outside the auditorium to be picked up on the way out.

Questions and answers

There are two options for a question-and-answer period. One is to have individuals called upon from the audience, or have them line up at a microphone, to verbally ask their questions. The moderator will recognize individuals to speak.

The other option is to have audience members write their questions down on index cards and submit them. A screening committee of three people should review the questions before submitting them to the moderator. The screening committee is responsible for weeding out inappropriate questions and slander. Written

questions make the moderator's job easier, since he or she won't have to deal with audience members who want to make a statement, rather than ask a question.

All candidates must be asked the same questions and given the same amount of time to respond.

Again, OSBA has developed some questions based on its Legislative Platform that can be found on page 17. If you choose to develop your own questions:

- word questions simply;
- choose issues of major interest to your school district;
- don't let a question seem to favor any candidate;
- restrict issues to those solvable at the state level;
- have the moderator explain technical language briefly, e.g. "IEP," "NCLB;"
- ask both general and specific questions.

Programs

Programs for the candidates' night should be distributed to all in attendance, including the candidates. They should include the agenda for the meeting, a list of the candidates and the biographical information submitted from the candidates. On the last page of the program, acknowledge all cosponsors, volunteers and donations received.

Suggested timeline for Candidates' Night

As soon as possible

- review OSBA packet;
- find cosponsors.

August

- contact county Republican and Democratic parties' headquarters;
- pick a date;
- choose a location;
- arrange for a moderator.

Early September

- develop rules for the forum;
- prepare packets to be sent to candidates;
- invite candidates, send them biography form, request return by ____ date, rules for debate and meeting agenda (sample attached);
- arrange for band members to perform (optional).

Middle of September

- compile candidate information for distribution;
- develop questions (sample attached).

Two weeks prior to candidates' night

- notify media (newspapers, TV, radio, where appropriate);
- send fliers home with students;
- arrange for refreshments;
- assign hostesses or hosts;
- make volunteer (timekeeper, usher, etc.) assignments;
- post on outside announcement boards.

One week prior to candidates' night

- follow up with media.

Post event

- promote news release.

Candidates' Night meeting information

sample

Agenda

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 7 p.m. | Music |
| 7:15 p.m. | Pledge of Allegiance Introductions — Board members, cohost and moderator |
| 7:30 p.m. | Opening statements Questions and answers Audience questions and answers Closing statements |
| 9 p.m. | Adjourn Refreshments |

Ground rules

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Time limit for opening statements: | 3 minutes |
| Responses to questions: | 1 minute |
| Timekeeper's warning: | 1 minute card 30 second card Time-buzzer |
| Closing statements: | 2 minutes |

Question period

1. Questions must be written legibly and will be asked by the moderator. All candidates will be given an opportunity to respond to any question.
2. All questions are screened by an impartial committee. Duplicate or related questions may be combined.
3. Answers are limited to one minute.
4. The moderator's ruling is final in distribution of questions.

In the event that a candidate does not attend the meeting:

1. No one may speak in the candidate's place, in fairness to others.
2. A brief explanation of the candidate's absence may be read by the moderator.

Candidates and their supporters may distribute campaign materials after the meeting. Thank you for your cooperation.

Ground rules for Candidates' Night

sample

1. Candidates are asked to arrive 15 minutes early.
2. Candidates are not permitted to distribute campaign literature in the meeting room. A table will be available outside the meeting room for campaign literature.
3. Substitutes or written statements in lieu of a candidate's appearance are not permitted.
4. Each candidate will have no longer than three minutes for a personal statement. A timekeeper will be present.
5. The order of speaking will be alphabetical.
6. There will be a moderator for the event.
7. Written questions will be taken from the audience. Each candidate may participate in the question-and-answer session.
8. If the question is directed to a specific candidate, other candidates will have the opportunity to respond. Those questions not specifically directed to a candidate will be answered on a rotating basis as to which candidate answers first.
9. Questions and answers will be limited to one minute each.
10. Each candidate will be given two minutes for a closing statement.

General tips for the moderator

- Be aware of the timekeeper's signals.
 - Be firm, but friendly, a smile often cuts through a tense situation.
 - Maintain ready access to the microphone so you can keep control of any situation that might otherwise get out of hand.
 - Remember that you have the right to adjourn the meeting if it becomes unmanageable.
 - Even in a small auditorium, repeat each question so everyone in the audience hears the main points.
 - Be prepared for ticklish situations with useful phrases like:
 - “We realize many of you have strong feelings on some of these issues, but the rest of us have come tonight so we might be informed by listening to the candidates themselves.”
 - “Some of you are already committed, but many here are not; you do not help your cause with these interruptions.”
 - “We wish time permitted us to hear more personal views in detail, but we must restrict ourselves to the candidates' interpretations.”
 - “Please phrase your statement as a question for the candidates.”
- (Taken from the League of Women Voters' *Voters Service Handbook for Ohio.*)

Invitation memo

sample

TO: County board presidents
County legislative liaisons
County superintendents
County treasurers

FROM:

DATE:

RE: Grassroots advocacy organizational meeting

At the request of various education advocates in the _____ area, we are organizing a grassroots advocacy organizational meeting in _____. Every public school district in _____ and across Ohio is facing the challenge of how to deal with state funding for our schools. Many districts are being forced to cut programs at a time when education standards for student achievement are increasing. It is critical to share these realities with our state elected officials.

Please join us for a meeting of _____ School Officials on **date**. The meeting will be held at the **location of meeting and time**.

The purpose of this meeting is to develop a strategy for discussion of education issues in anticipation of a future meeting with state legislators from _____. Please bring ideas and stories your district is facing because of the decisions state legislators are making in Columbus.

A concerted grassroots effort that speaks with one voice is an effective way to build relationships with local legislators. As every one of you know, there is no public group closer to the grassroots of the community and schoolchildren than our elected boards of education. Together, we can have a very powerful voice.

RSVP and contact information here.

Grassroots advocacy meeting questionnaire

sample

1. Please list your top three legislative issues:
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
2. Are you interested in starting up a grassroots program?
3. If so, what do you think should be the mission of this group?
4. What would you set as goals to achieve through our advocacy efforts?

Questions

sample

General issues

1. How would you, as a citizen, rate the quality of Ohio's schools?
2. Do you believe that every child in Ohio has an equal opportunity to have a first-rate education?
3. What are the major problems you believe are facing Ohio's school districts and what steps do you believe the General Assembly should take to alleviate these problems?
4. Should the school day or school year be expanded or restructured? If so, by how much and why?
5. What changes should be instituted to Ohio's Collective Bargaining Law?
6. Should local districts be able to terminate or nonrenew teachers who fail to correct deficiencies noted in evaluations?
7. Should local boards of education have the ability to exempt themselves from laws and rules that do not apply to chartered, nonpublic schools or community schools? Why or why not?
8. Would you support legislation restoring the State Board of Education to an all-elected body, or are you supportive of the current elected-appointed hybrid board?

Finance

9. Do you believe Ohio has adequately dealt with this state's school facilities problems?
10. Do you believe the General Assembly has adequately responded to the Supreme Court's mandate for "a complete systematic overhaul" of the state's school-funding scheme?
11. What do you think the state needs to do to significantly reduce a school district's overreliance on property taxes?
12. Do you agree or disagree with the statement, "An Ohio child's educational opportunities rely too heavily on where they live and the ability of their community to tax itself?"
13. Should the state be required to provide low-wealth school districts with the funds necessary to provide the programs that high-wealth districts have (such as all-day kindergarten, technology, advanced placement courses, etc.) or is the state simply required to provide a minimal education?
14. Should Ohio pay for education programs in low-wealth school districts by redistributing local funds from higher-wealth districts?
15. Because of the lack of growth in local property taxes, commonly known as the "House Bill (HB) 920 reduction," school districts are required to go to the voters for new tax levies every three to five years. Should the General Assembly address this issue and, if so, how?

16. The Supreme Court stated in May 2000 that Ohio school districts are “plagued” by phantom revenue. Under current law, when property tax assessments go up, they are not matched with corresponding revenue increases and can reduce a local district’s state aid. What would you do to solve all forms of phantom revenue?

17. Nonpublic schools in Ohio currently receive the highest amount of state funding per pupil of all 50 states. Is Ohio committing too many resources to our nonpublic schools at the expense of public school students?

18. When the General Assembly passes laws that affect the local property tax base, such as the phase out of the tangible personal property tax, does the state have an obligation to “hold those districts harmless” in light of potential revenue losses?

19. Should the General Assembly earmark certain portions of the budget or certain sources of tax revenue for funding education?

20. Will you support a tax increase for schools that is not submitted to the voters?

Governance

21. Should the state, through the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), have the ability to assume control of school districts that are not meeting performance standards?

22. What should be the role of local boards of education in regard to chartered/community schools in education reform?

23. Do you support the privatization of school services, such as transportation, food service or maintenance?

24. In light of the Ohio General Assembly’s expansion of vouchers through the Ohio Education Choice Scholarship Program, what would you do to ensure accountability for public tax dollars going to this program?

25. Would you support legislation requiring private schools participating in the voucher program to accept students with disabilities, low levels of achievement and limited English skills?

26. Would you support legislation requiring private schools accepting vouchers to administer all the Ohio Achievement exams to those students and to report the results?

Community schools

27. Do you believe that sponsorship of community schools should be limited to regularly elected or appointed school boards, or do you agree with the expansion of sponsorship that included non-profit 501(c)(3) entities?

28. To date, community school performance data shows most of these schools lagging far behind even the lowest-performing public school districts. In light of the academic and financial problems still occurring in community schools, do you believe there should be a cap on the number of community schools allowed to operate until adequate performance data is available?

29. How do you believe community schools should be held accountable for the public tax dollars they receive?

Invitation letter

sample

Date

The Honorable _____
The Ohio House of Representatives/The Ohio Senate
Statehouse
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Meeting with School Officials of _____

Dear Representative/Senator:

Education policy is constantly evolving, and dialogue between educators and policymakers is now more important than ever. Recently, a group of school officials from _____ have been meeting regularly to organize a forum to discuss education issues. Attached please find information for the upcoming meeting with school officials representing the school districts of _____. This meeting is scheduled for **DATE, TIME** and **PLACE**.

The information enclosed includes an agenda for the meeting and a list of questions that represent the issues school districts face with the current state of education. We will not be seeking remedy to these issues immediately with this one initial meeting. Rather, these topics serve as a template for ongoing discussions in what we hope will be regular meetings between school officials and our elected officials.

Please RSVP to _____ by (**date**). I hope you will be able to attend and if you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

NAME

Enclosures

Candidate confirmation letter

sample

Date

Address

Dear _____:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Candidates' Night to be held at (place) on (date) at (time).

We hope you will be able to arrive by (time) and meet in the (place). The candidates' portion of the program will begin promptly at (time).

Enclosed you will find the time schedule and ground rules that have been adopted for the evening. Please note the ground rules, which requests that candidates or their supporters not distribute campaign literature, signs or buttons until the meeting is adjourned.

If you have not done so, please complete the biographical information form attached to the invitation letter and return it by (date). This information will be compiled and distributed to the audience prior to statements from the candidates. Since the audience will have specific information on your education and experience, we hope you will speak to the issues you consider most important in your prepared statement.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping to make this a fair and impartial meeting. If you have any questions, please call me.

Sincerely,

Name
board member, school district
(phone number)
(e-mail address)

Enclosure: Meeting schedule
Ground rules
Biographical form
Directions

Candidate biographical information

sample

Note: This information will not be published unless you have signed in the space provided at the end of the questionnaire.

Candidate for: _____

Party: _____

Name of candidate: _____ Age: _____

Address: _____

The following section on occupation, education and qualifications for office is limited to 75 words for the three sections combined:

Occupation: _____

Education: _____

Qualifications for office: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

This questionnaire must be returned no later than (date).

To:

News release

sample

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October ____, 2008

for more information, contact
(name) (phone number)

Candidates to address education issues

(LOCATION OF FORUM) — The _____ will host a
“Meet the Candidates” night on _____ at _____ p.m.

(Name) County candidates running for the Ohio General Assembly will address education issues and respond to questions. The public is invited and may submit questions for the candidates. There will be time following the program to personally meet the candidates.

Candidates who have agreed to participate include: _____

_____.

The meeting is being sponsored by the _____ and the following boards of education and their respective parent teacher associations: _____

_____.

Flier copy

sample

Has the state implemented a systematic overhaul of school funding?

Has phantom revenue been solved?

Will school districts still be asking local voters for property tax increases every three to five years?

Do you support school vouchers?

Do you support community schools?

Should rich school districts give to poor districts?

Come hear how your candidates for the Ohio General Assembly answer these questions and many more.

Be an informed voter.

Know how the person you elect to represent you in Columbus views public education.

Attend a candidates' night

time: _____

date: _____

location: _____

What is *Kids* PAC?

Complete your advocacy through political donations



Kids PAC is OSBA's political action committee or PAC. Technically speaking, a PAC is the name commonly given to a private group organized to raise money and make contributions to legislators and candidates.

Realistically, *Kids* PAC provides school board members with the opportunity to focus attention on OSBA's legislative agenda and support lawmakers who believe in the goals of the association.

Whether we like politics or not, political action committees are a part of the process that we must master as we advocate for the future of public education. Believe me — if we did not have to worry about campaign contributions — our lives would be a lot easier! But the reality is we need to be active players as we advocate for the children of Ohio. To do that, we need a strong PAC.

Community school reform, school finance, vouchers and accountability are issues that are always on the General Assembly's radar. Legislators face tough decisions on these topics every day and through *Kids* PAC, we are able to make sure our voice is heard.

In the era of term limits, legislators are trying to make their mark and move up the political ladder as soon as possible. It is now more important than ever to support legislators who consistently support public education. Strong, issue-based advocacy, and our 3,400 well-informed members will always be the strength of OSBA's advocacy efforts. But, if we can't support our friends in the legislature with campaign contributions, our efforts will be incomplete.

Elections cost money, lots of money — that's a simple reality. A key element of the process is contributing to political campaigns. *Kids* PAC funds allow OSBA to build and maintain important legislative relationships. They enable OSBA lobbyists to attend fundraising events where valuable one-on-one time can be spent with key lawmakers.

Your participation in *Kids* PAC is crucial to the success of OSBA's lobbying efforts on behalf of public schools. Think of it this way, if every school board member contributed just \$25 a year to *Kids* PAC, we would raise over \$80,000 annually.

How to contribute to and grow *Kids* PAC

Kids PAC needs your donations – big or small. Here are some suggestions on how to donate to and help expand *Kids* PAC and our political clout:

- Fill out the enclosed *Kids* PAC membership form and mail it back to OSBA.
- Visit the *Kids* PAC booth at the OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show to make your annual donation. The *Kids* PAC booth is always located in the 100 isle of the trade show.
- Attending an OSBA workshop? Pick up a *Kids* PAC brochure, fill it out and give it to the OSBA staff member hosting the workshop.
- Nothing beats “peer to-peer” campaigning. Encourage your fellow board members to donate \$25 to *Kids* PAC and send in the entire board donation to OSBA. Your board will receive special recognition in OSBA's publications.
- Need to educate fellow board members on *Kids* PAC? Copy this page along with the membership

form included in this toolkit. Discuss it at your next board meeting during a legislative update.

- Donate one meeting's pay to *Kids* PAC.
- Host a *Kids* PAC fundraiser. Invite other school board members to attend from your region and have a member of the OSBA legislative division provide a legislative update at the get together.
- Starting a grassroots advocacy group? Make PAC donations a component of your advocacy goals. Organize a regional PAC fundraising steering committee. Have each person contact five school board members and ask them to donate. Contact the OSBA legislative division to assist in the coordination of this committee.

Word of mouth is critical to the success of our PAC. Talk about *Kids* PAC with fellow board members when discussing politics or advocacy.

A strong PAC is a significant component of our success!

Kids PAC challenge

OSBA is asking all board members to donate \$25 per year to *Kids PAC*, which would help to raise over \$80,000. Imagine the impact this could have for public education!

The OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show kicks off the *Kids PAC* membership year, which runs from November to November.



Contributions can be made by personal check, made payable to *Kids PAC*, or cash up to \$100. By law, school district and corporate checks cannot be accepted.

Note: *Contributions are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.*

Remember Ohio's kids are counting on you!

Yes, I believe that Ohio's kids are counting on me! Sign me up for *Kids PAC*!

Name _____

E-mail _____

Home address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

School district _____

County _____

Title _____

Date _____ Amount contributed \$ _____

If donation exceeds \$100, contributor must provide occupation and employment information.

New member

Sustaining member

Please complete and return to:
Kids PAC
Ohio School Boards Association
8050 N. High St., Ste. 100
Columbus, OH 43235-6481



Ohio School Boards Association
8050 N. High St., Suite 100
Columbus OH 43235-6481

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