

School Choice Ohio Advocacy Toolkit



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About School Choice Ohio

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, School Choice Ohio reaches out to Ohio families by mail, phone, email, social media, and community events to inform them about the education options that are available for their children. We serve as a resource for Ohio families, community organizations, schools, community members, elected officials, and the media.

Giving parents real power and information about the thing that matters most to them – the education of their children – is the only way to drive sustained, continuous improvement of Ohio's education system.

Contents

- Using Your Voice
- Working with Policymakers
 - Hosting a Visit
 - Writing a Letter to Your Legislator or State Board of Education Member
 - Visiting the Statehouse
 - Providing Testimony
- Media Relations
 - Using Social Media
 - Photos
 - Videos
 - Letters to the Editor
- School Choice Resources
 - Parental Choice in Ohio Fact Sheet
 - Demand Grows for Scholarship Programs
 - Printable Signs

Using Your Voice

Do you believe that parents know their children best? Do you believe that Ohio families should be able to select the educational option that works best for their children? Would you like to see Ohio expand educational options for Ohio families? If you answered yes to any of the questions above, you're ready to become a voice for parental choice and educational options.

Successful advocacy is positive, factual, and respectful; we can disagree without being disagreeable.

This advocacy guide is designed to provide tips and ideas on advocacy activities that will work for schools and families.

We at School Choice Ohio are your advocacy partner. If you have questions or want additional information, you can reach out to us at advocacy@scoho.org or message us on our Facebook page.

Working with Policymakers

Hosting a Visit by Legislators or State Board of Education Members

You want to make sure that the people making decisions about your school understand your school and its mission. The best way to accomplish this is to invite your state or local representatives to your school for a visit. It can be a formal visit during a planned event at the school or just a tour of the school during a school day.

Representatives/board members are generally receptive to visits if it works with their schedule. You want to make sure that your invitation is not a day that they are scheduled to be in session or a meeting.

Here are some basic steps you can take to ensure a successful visit:

- Check and see who represents your school by visiting <https://ohiohouse.gov/> for your state representative, <https://www.ohiosenate.gov/senators> for your state senator.
- State Board of Education members and their districts are available here: <https://education.ohio.gov/State-Board/State-Board-Members>
- Reach out to their office by phone or email and see which days work best for their schedule. Give them 2-3 dates that would work for your school and set a date and time. Follow up with a confirmation email.
- Develop an outline of what you would like to have the representative experience and discuss it with your school's staff. You will want the visit to be organized and timely.
- You may wish to invite local media (newspaper or television station) to be part of the visit. You may also want to ask members of your school's board to join the visit.
- Email the representative or their staff confirming the visit along with a schedule, directions, and arrival instructions.
- Welcome the representative/member to the school. Be sure to introduce them to students and teachers.
- Post pictures on the school's social media pages of the visit thanking the representative/board member for coming.
- Follow-up the visit with a thank you letter from the students.

This visit will impact your school for years to come in many ways. This visit is not only a great way to introduce your school to your state and local representatives, but it is also a great chance to share a civics lesson with students.

Writing a Letter to Your Legislator or State Board of Education Member

Another way to connect with your representative is to send a letter to your state or local representative. Sending a letter is a great exercise for students to learn how to format a letter and learn about who is representing them at the Statehouse. The letter could be a thank you letter for recent legislation or a request to come to visit your school.

The format of the top of the letter should look like this:

Your Name
School
School address
City, State, and Zip
DATE

*The Honorable (fill in the name of your state representative)
Ohio House of Representatives, Floor #
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215-6111*

Or for your state senator, use this address:

*The Honorable (fill in the name of your state senator)
Ohio Senate, Room #?
Statehouse, Senate Building
Columbus, OH 43215*

Dear Representative <Last Name> or Dear Senator <Last Name>
Dear Board Member Last Name

The bottom of the letter should have your signature.

Tips for writing your letter:

- *Be sure to include your e-mail and phone number in the letter so they can respond to you.*
- *Be respectful and positive.*

- *Use personal examples.*
- *Keep the letter short and sweet.*
- *Why are you writing? (i.e., invitation to visit, response to a bill (include the #) and your support of pending action)*
- *What would you like the legislator or board member to do? (i.e., support or oppose a bill or policy).*

Visiting the Statehouse

One of the best ways to connect with your school's legislator is with a personal visit to the Statehouse. You can make the day a field trip for your school and add a Statehouse tour. It is an excellent opportunity for students to meet face-to-face and talk with their legislators.

Legislators are generally eager to meet with their constituents. They also appreciate hearing from their constituents and their views on legislation. However, there are a few things you need to do to make sure the visit runs smoothly:

- Be sure to schedule an appointment. It is not always wise to drop in on the legislator.
- The best way to make an appointment is by phone so that you can secure a date. You can find the number at <https://ohiohouse.gov/> for your state representative or <https://www.ohiosenate.gov/senators> for your state Senator.
- If you want to take a tour of the Statehouse with your group, let them know at that time, and they can make the arrangements for you. Guided tours are offered Monday through Friday with the first tour beginning at 10 a.m. and the last tour beginning at 3 p.m. (Tours may be suspended due to COVID.)
- It is a good idea to have one spokesperson for the group. You may also want to review expectations for the visit with the group.
- Do not be disappointed if you cannot meet with the representative. Occasionally, they are called into session, and you must meet with a staffer. Many times, senior staff have more time to give. You can also consider a meeting with your legislator locally.
- If your group is there to present a view, share your information on the issue. If you have a fact sheet, be sure to have a copy for the representative.

Providing Testimony

Another effective way to advocate for your school is to present testimony at a public hearing for a legislative body such as the Ohio Senate or the Ohio House Education Committee on an issue that could impact your school. These committees are responsible for reviewing legislation impacting Ohio's primary education system, including standards and regulations managed by the Ohio Department of Education. There are also other committees at the Statehouse that invite testimony.

After you agree to give testimony, you will want to follow the procedure set by the committee to make sure that it is not a wasted trip to the Statehouse. Here are some things you will need to present your testimony:

- Submit a witness form, which can be found at the committee chair's legislative webpage. Forms need to be submitted 24 hours in advance, along with your testimony.
- Prepare your written testimony. You will have to submit a copy of your remarks to the committee in advance. You will want to introduce yourself first, tell them where you are from, and then share why you are testifying. Your comments should give your position and or offer a recommendation. You will want to be brief (5 minutes or less). Keep in mind that the committee may have other presenters that day.
- Be sure to note the hearing room location and the start time for the hearing and the committee members. You will want to give yourself plenty of time to park and find the room. Parking is available under the Statehouse, as well as additional garages nearby. You may also want to dress accordingly. The committee will be in suits, so you will want to wear proper attire when testifying.
- Please proceed to the podium once your name is called, and the chair will ask you to begin. You will deliver your testimony through the chair of the committee.
- After you present your testimony, you may be asked questions. You will want to address the chairman when you answer. If you do not know an answer, say that you do not have the information but will get it for the committee.
- When you are finished, thank the chair and the committee members for the opportunity to testify and return to your seat.

Media Relations

Utilizing Social Media

Webster defines social media as: *Forms of electronic communication (such as Web sites) through which people create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, etc.*

Today millions of people use at least one social media platform daily. Social media is one of the best places to market your school because it creates community engagement. Although Parents are busy, most say that they manage to check their social media accounts daily.

What social media platforms should you choose? Each social media platform has a different use and target audience, it is important to see what makes the most sense for you or your school.

- **Facebook** is an easy way for your school to connect with current families and market to prospective families. Your school can post all different types of content. Make sure your school's contact number, website, and address are visible on the page.
- **Instagram** allows users to quickly share an image or video of something that happened at your school today. It is popular with students, but you will need to make sure that the school has a regular posting schedule to stay relevant.
- **Twitter** is a social media site whose purpose is to connect people and to share their thoughts with a big audience using a Tweet!
- **LinkedIn** is a professional network used to connect with other professionals to share business information, establish a presence or find a job.

Once you have selected your social media platform(s) you will want to add the icons to your school's website, ads, bulletins, etc., and encourage your families to like, share or post on the platforms.

You may also want to find a social media monitoring tool to assist your school in managing the platforms. Popular platforms include HootSuite, Wildfire, and Sprout Social. These platforms will allow your school to track results and schedule posts.

Consider using hashtags such as #schoolchoice or #schoolchoicenow to connect your posts to others supporting the same issue.

If you're new to social media, here several guides that can help you get started.

Getting Started with Twitter <https://help.twitter.com/en/resources/twitter-guide>

How to Use Twitter - Complete Beginner's Guide
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwKwOyb62xs>

How to Use Facebook <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-use-facebook>

How to Use Facebook- A Beginner's Guide
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xu8rh9Ref4Y>

Instagram 101: How to Get Started with Instagram
<https://www.theverge.com/2020/2/27/21156337/instagram-basics-install-account-username-settings-get-started-how-to>

Taking Photographs

Words are powerful, but people are often more likely to respond to an image. It's particularly important to provide a visual aspect to posts on social media.

Fortunately, smartphones make it easier than ever to take photo or record a video and the tips below will help your images look great.

- 1) Make sure your phone's camera lens is clean and free of any obstructions.
- 2) If you plan to regularly use your phone to record photos or videos for social media, you may want to invest in a tripod or mount for your smartphone.
- 3) Make sure you have the right amount of light.
- 4) If your phone has a timer feature, learn to use it so you can also be in your photos.
- 5) Use the zoom feature sparingly.
- 6) Don't be afraid of using candid shots.

This advocacy toolkit includes two signs you can easily print and hold in photos. Those signs can help connect your social media posts to other school choice advocates.

Tips for Creating Videos

1. Write a script so you know what you want to say. Of course, you don't want to read the script for the video, but writing a short script and practicing 2-3 times will help you feel more comfortable.
2. Don't forget to introduce yourself. It can be as simple as, "Hi. My name is Sally Smith. My family and I live in Columbus, Ohio. (Introduce anyone else that will be in the video with you.) I'd like to talk to you about _____." Or, you can introduce yourself toward the end of your video.
3. Tell your audience what you're going to discuss. For example:
"I'd like to talk to you about . . ."
 - Why my family looked for school choice options
 - How great school choice can be
 - How school choice or scholarship or charter school helped my child
 - How receiving a state-funded scholarship changed my child's life
4. Keep videos relatively short – 90-120 seconds maximum. If possible, please do not use HD. HD makes the video file larger, which takes longer to upload.
5. Getting your video to SCO:
 - Option A:** Videos can be saved to a flash drive and mailed to SCO offices.
 - Option B:** Once a video is recorded, send an email to media@scohoio.org. SCO will email a link to a Google drive or Dropbox to allow you upload the video.
 - Option C:** Videos can be uploaded to YouTube. Email a link to the video to media@scohoio.org.

If you post the video or photo on your social media channel, send a link to School Choice Ohio at advocacy@scohoio.org or message us on Twitter or Facebook.

Video Script Example:

[OPENING] Hello. I'd like to talk to you about how the EdChoice Scholarship helped my son James.

[THE PROBLEM] James was excited to go to school. He always loved books and wanted to learn to read. But our local school wasn't working out. James was struggling in class and was being bullied by several older children. He went from wanting to go to school to finding every excuse to stay home. We made it through kindergarten, but I knew we couldn't go through another school year with the same problems.

[THE SOLUTION] I heard about the EdChoice scholarship. I couldn't believe that James might be eligible for a scholarship to attend a private school. James was approved for a scholarship, and we enrolled him in private school. It was amazing. James began to blossom, learning to read and making friends. No more worrying about being bullied.

[INTRODUCE THE SPEAKER] My name is Sally Smith, and my family, and I live in Columbus, Ohio.

[CLOSING MESSAGE] Children are not all the same. Parents know what will work best for their child and should be able to send their child to the school of their choice where they are welcomed, safe and able to learn and grow.

This example is offered to suggest how to organize thoughts and create a script. Please customize your statement. A video using the script shared above will last approximately 70 seconds.

Letters to the Editor

An excellent way to share the importance of maintaining and expanding school choice is by sending a letter to your local newspaper or online media outlet.

Tips For Letters to the Editor

- Open the letter with "To the Editor."
- Your first sentence should tell the reader what you're writing about. Make sure your opening encourages people to keep reading the letter.
- Why is the issue you are writing about important?
- Support your view with examples. Personal stories and statistics are helpful.
- Be clear, concise, respectful, and try not to exceed the word limit. Shorter letters are more likely to be accepted and published.

- If you have an idea regarding how to solve the problem or address the issue, include your idea(s).
- Make sure to include your name, your address, and contact information. Most media outlets will not publish a letter to the editor without verifying the author's identity.
- Some newspapers use an email form to submit letters to the editor.

Below are links to Ohio's major media outlets.

Columbus Dispatch

<https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/letters/2020/11/03/columbus-dispatch-letter-editor-submissions/6150040002/>

Cleveland Plain Dealer

https://www.cleveland.com/opinion/2014/08/submit_a_letter_to_the_plain_d.html

Cincinnati Enquirer

[https://static.cincinnati.com/letter/Cincinnati Enquirer](https://static.cincinnati.com/letter/Cincinnati%20Enquirer)

Toledo Blade

<https://www.toledoblade.com/letterstoeditor>

Akron Beacon Journal

vop@thebeaconjournal.com

Dayton Daily News

<https://www.daytondailynews.com/opinion/sendletter/>

Canton Repository

letters@cantonrep.com

Youngstown Vindicator

<https://www.vindy.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor>

Lima News

<https://www.limaohio.com/formeditor>